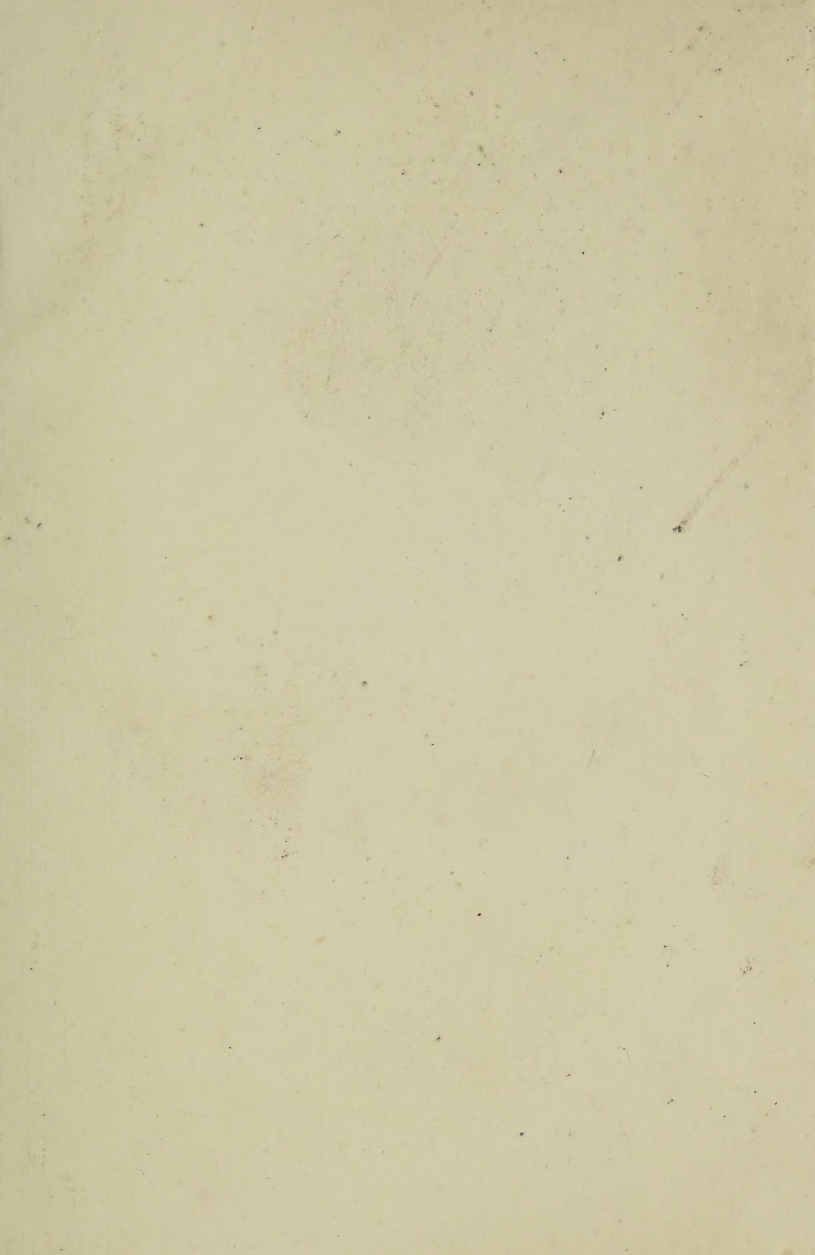


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MARTIN FRENCH

BY

JOHN BRADSHAW,

AUTHOR OF "DEDHAM PARK," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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PART V.

MARTIN FRENCH.



CHAPTER I.

OF MALICE AFORETHOUGHT.

ALL Camptown—all Camptown, that is, above the level of mediocrity—soon heard of the engagement. For such news travels apace.

Amongst others, Fleming heard of it, and Martin's success but increased his angry feelings. Was it always to be thus—the other favoured and himself despised? The fellow had not only robbed him of Minnie's love, but, that first toyed with and then cast aside, he was now to be rewarded with the hand of the loveliest and perhaps

richest girl in the neighbourhood. And Fleming, urged thereto by the greatness of his jealousy, hated Martin with redoubled hate.

Henrietta Claydon-Pigott heard of it. Upon which, she too felt jealous—but of Dorothy and not of Martin. Her own affair still halted. George Spencer had not so far been taken in the meshes of her net. Since the meeting of the Locksley Archers at Barton Hall another winter had come and gone. She had hung upon his arm at countless balls; had danced with him more times than she could remember; and yet he was still free, nor was she nearer to the consummation of her hope.

And, following upon the steps of winter, had returned another summer—a summer well-nigh spent—which for the most part had been fine, and therefore favourable to her purpose. During its continuance she and George had spent hours in each other's

company on cricket-ground, at flower-shows, at reviews, at picnics. On many an evening they had strolled about the garden when the heat indoors caused the deepening twilight to be doubly grateful. And yet she had reaped no return from her great opportunities. She was still Miss Claydon-Pigott, and that without an immediate prospect of bettering her condition. The fact thus offered to her contemplation was no doubt painful, but not on that account less true. And, whilst she stood confronting it, came the news of Dorothy's engagement, causing her to reflect even more seriously upon her own position, and rousing in her breast a pang which, if not jealousy, was that torturer's close ally.

Moreover, and which added to her trouble, the domestic relations of the family in York Place were, to say the least, a trifle out of gear. The last instalment of Mr. Claydon-Pigott's salary had been paid in June, and,

it being now the second week in September, Mrs. Claydon-Pigott's purse was empty. The butcher was getting independent, the greengrocer sullen, and the baker had grown importunate with regard to an early settlement of his little bill. Had it been desirable to give one of those little parties which Mrs. Claydon-Pigott so greatly affected, money would have been wanting wherewith to pay the day-waiters and obtain from the market the several necessaries. In fact, the good lady's skeleton had stalked boldly from its cupboard, and its chains rattled loudly through the house.

To make matters worse, and despite the earnest entreaties of his wife, Mr. Claydon-Pigott had determinedly refused to part with the smallest fraction of that percentage which he kept for his private uses. Instead, he had betaken himself, as was his wont during these recurrent periods of financial embarrassment, to his club—there to dine

off a mutton chop and to enjoy his rubber, undisturbed by the incessant nagging which would have destroyed his appetite had he joined the circle around his hearth.

In this he was selfish, but not altogether inexcusable. He had given Mrs. Claydon-Pigott warning that such would be the consequence of her late and continued extravagance. He had pointed out that, if she could not make both ends meet, she must reduce her expenditure, buy fewer dresses for the girls, give up the brougham which she jobbed by the week, and not indulge in so many little parties. By the recollection of which advice he not only salved his conscience, but ate his club-dinners with comparative enjoyment.

Unfortunately, his advice produced no effect. As each pay-day came round, and Mrs. Claydon-Pigott's purse grew bulky, a desire to sparkle in the world and the hope of securing a position for "the girls"

overpowered all thought of retrenchment. The good lady forgot her previous troubles. She quieted the independent butcher, the sullen greengrocer, and importunate baker by liquidating just so little of their several accounts as they could be induced to allow. She recommenced her little parties, and was lavish in her use of the brougham.

But this second week in September Mrs. Claydon-Pigott's purse happened to be empty, her worries were numerous, and her temper was affected. Mr. Claydon-Pigott absented himself as much as possible, and left the girls to bear the brunt of his wife's ill-humour. Fanny had become dismal, seeking relief in tears; Esther was more troublesome than usual; whilst Henrietta's pretty face wore an expression at times so sour as to mar its beauty.

And over and above her financial difficulties, Mrs. Claydon-Pigott had yet another source of discontent. Twelve months had

elapsed since Henrietta despised her assistance, and the girl appeared no nearer to a settlement in life. It was too provoking. It was enough to make any mother's temper crabbed, let alone one whose care for her children was so nice as her own. Nor was Fanny less irritating than Henrietta. Notwithstanding all maternal hints to the contrary, she persisted in her old courses. She surrounded herself with a crowd of useless, unprofitable triflers, whose every member was ready to whisper soft nothings, but unable, from his impecuniosity, to relieve her of farther anxiety in respect of dear Fanny's future. But even Fanny's conduct was in a measure less reprehensible than that of Henrietta. The former *had* kept an arrow in her quiver—one not to be discharged at random, but to prove of good service should its fellows have been vainly loosed, and which, if directed against Kidwelly Thompson, would surely hit the mark.

The latter had been less provident, wasting her full quiver, reserving not an arrow should her present attack prove futile. Stupid, undutiful, unteachable, as were both her daughters, the mother was inclined to back Fanny's chance against Henrietta's, and it was against Henrietta that she launched her most biting sarcasms.

To all seeming, these were launched in vain. They appeared to glance from Henrietta's breast no less harmlessly than does the assassin's dagger from mail of proof. However great their venom, the girl remained unshaken, and bent upon success. And yet, there came times when, in the solitude of her chamber, she fainted.

But such times were few. She could for the most part control her fears and keep a stout heart. And, now that her home had become thus unendurable, now that, to speak figuratively, she could not find a resting-place in it for the sole of her foot,

she determined to make one great effort—free herself from its trammels, or lose all in the attempt. She pondered the matter long and anxiously. In no case must she be precipitate. Too much—ay, far too much—depended on a happy issue to her scheme. Yet, what that scheme ought to be, she could not at once determine. It must comprise something more thorough than a ball. She had been to many balls since first laying siege to George Spencer's heart, but they had profited her nothing. Flower-shows or reviews, so far as that season was concerned, were matters of history. It was too late in the year to suggest another picnic—the weather too uncertain to admit of its probable success. No. None of these things could avail her now. She required, too, something less ephemeral than these; something which would throw George Spencer in her path from day to day, and from hour to hour; something which would

enable her to exert a continuous influence upon his life, and from which he could not escape. And hitherto that something had eluded her touch.

Hitherto—but not for long. When the mind is bent upon attainment, it seldom fails. And Henrietta, intent upon a solution of her difficulty, was to prove no exception to a rule so universal.

For days she met with no success. Hour after hour she schemed, but with no result. When, out of the darkness beamed a light, and she could cry, with Archimedes—if that great inventor ever did so cry—“Eureka! Eureka!” The greatest discoveries are most times the result of accident. Thus, Newton was sitting, perhaps heedlessly, but certainly alone, when a few stray apples falling from a tree led him to discover the principle of gravitation. Thus, the aroma rising from the ashes of his burnt-out cabin caused the heathen Chinees first to entertain

and then to remit to other generations a wholesome regard for the rind of roast pork. And so it is with all great discoveries : they are found when least expected. Man toils ; but attains not. Time is when his control over some existence becomes necessary to his well-being, and, lo ! it is present to his hand. “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.” And yet, “because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge ; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order, many proverbs.”

For days, then, Henrietta had schemed, but with no result ; until at last she began to despair. Then, all suddenly, an idea presented itself to her hand, and she grasped it eagerly, like to the drowning mortal who clutches at a straw.

On a certain afternoon she was sitting in her bedroom, down-hearted and fresh from

an unusually bitter altercation with her mother, languidly exchanging her shoes for walking boots, when there flashed across her brain the magic word, "theatricals." And, following the word, came pell-mell an host of cogent arguments in its favour. In the twinkling of an eye she realized that in theatricals she had found the very thing of which she had been in search. Theatricals entailed rehearsals. Rehearsals necessitated love-scenes which might be simulated, but which, on the other hand, might be productive of permanent results. Then, theatricals meant constant intercourse; slight quarrels, soon to be mended, but adding a zest to the tedium of preparation; opportunities for soft glances; ripe occasions for spreading her toils as they had never been spread before. By all means, let it be theatricals.

That her proposition might be set at naught did not for one moment cause her

the least uneasiness. She had a too-firm belief in her diplomacy to entertain the possibility of a *contretemps* so disastrous. Instead, she hastened to lace her boots, to put on her cloak, and to adjust her hat, preparatory to an immediate inception of the campaign which she was about to undertake. For why delay? Better to commence operations at once than to defer them to a later time. Better to strike the first blow whilst her enthusiasm was at the flood, than to wait until it was ebbing through the tips of her rosy fingers. So she took one last look at her face in the glass—regulating a stray lock upon her forehead until it had the semblance of a greater carelessness, smoothing a ribbon here and arranging a bow there—one last look, until convinced that her appearance was unexceptionable, and that, so far as one part of her preparations was concerned, she could do no more.

Descending the stairs, she stumbled against her mother.

“Going out, Henrietta?” inquired the latter.

“Such is my intention; unless, indeed, you remand me to the cell upstairs.”

“Heaven forbid, child! for by dinner-time your temper would have become unendurable.” Then, noticing the girl’s heightened colour and sparkling eye, she added, “Where are you going, my love? Not into town, I hope. It is most improper in a girl of your age to wander about the streets alone.”

“Save yourself all anxiety on that score, mamma. I am going to the Cedars.”

“Just so, my love. And how much longer, if I may be allowed to put the question, do you intend to waste the precious hours—dangling after a man who has no intention of coming to the point?”

“So long as it pleases me, mamma.

And that, remember, without any interference on your part."

Mrs. Claydon-Pigott regarded her child angrily. "You are little short of a fool," she exclaimed, "to neglect all other men for the sake of that Will-with-a-wisp."

"Have you any more compliments to make, and of the same agreeable import?" retorted Henrietta, dropping a stiff little curtsy. "If not, perhaps you will allow me to depart?"

"None other than this, my love. When you come to realize the emptiness of your hope, don't lay the blame at my door—don't say that I did not give you warning." Having delivered herself of which, the anxious mother re-entered the drawing-room, slamming the door in her daughter's face.

When Henrietta left the house, she did not at once go to the Cedars. It was full early to do so yet, wanting a good hour of

the time when Mrs. Spencer would be enjoying her afternoon tea. And Mrs. Spencer was never so practicable as then. It was the one period of the day which reminded her of a happier, bygone time; of the old parlour, where, after her scrubbing-brush had been laid aside and her person tidied, she had been accustomed to enjoy the same alluring beverage. And yet, for so she often sadly reflected, with a difference. Then, she prepared the tea-things herself, and saw that the kettle boiled. Now, tea was made in the still-room, and with water which she felt sure had never boiled.

But there was another reason which prompted Henrietta not to arrive at the Cedars too early. George Spencer would not be at home before five o'clock, and without his agreement it would be useless to plead her cause. So, entering Albert Park, she determined to occupy the inter-

vening moments by a brisk walk. She was glad to have a little time in which to prepare herself more thoroughly for the part which she was so soon to play. She had no fear that Mrs. Spencer would refuse to give the entertainment; but, her consent being taken for granted, there remained several important considerations to be determined.

Firstly, the proposed theatricals necessitated the formation of a company, and a company must include in its composition persons of either sex. As to the men, it did not so much matter, provided that George Spencer was cast for one of the principal characters. But as to the ladies—ah, there came the rub! It would never do to be hoist by her own petard, and to find that her scheming had resulted in the advancement of another. Yet, there was some danger of this. The rich Miss Poppleton had of late been dividing George

Spencer's attentions with herself, and it would never do for Miss Poppleton to be one of the leading ladies ; nor, indeed, if it could be avoided, must she be intrusted with even a minor part. Then, Miss Bolitho must, if possible, be eschewed. For, although she had no figure to speak of, nor any pretension to good looks, she would come to the rehearsals accompanied by the sharp eyes of Mrs. Bolitho. And Henrietta knew that Mrs. Bolitho, jealous of her pretty face, and regarding it as altogether too antagonistic to her daughter's plainer features, would attempt to throw the apple of discord between George Spencer and herself. No ; she must be very careful as to the ladies. Fanny would do for one ; and even Esther would make a good sou-brette. But Miss Poppleton and Eva Bolitho ! If they were to be included, she had better let the matter drop.

Then, what style of piece and dress would

display her figure to its best advantage. A play, she thought, of the Georgian era, which would permit of satin petticoats and short skirts; in which her hair could be powdered, and a patch or two, adroitly disposed, assist the brilliancy of her complexion; in which her deftly moving feet would be visible, and she could exhibit just so much of a neat ankle as propriety would allow. Not that Henrietta was over-prudish; but she knew that it would be impolitic to fly in the face of Camptown prejudices. No play, in fact, could be more adapted to her purpose than one of the Georgian era. In it the love-making would be above-board and unmistakable, the dresses all that could be desired, the time to be bestowed upon its preparation necessarily long, and on that account the more commensurate with her need.

And what playwright more suitable than Sheridan, or more popular with an audience?

In what other comedies could be found such flashes of sparkling wit? By all means let it be Sheridan. And if Sheridan, why, perhaps "The Rivals" would be better than "The School for Scandal." The former might not be quite so popular as the latter; but it would be better adapted to their company in general, and to herself in particular. She felt that she could make something out of "Lydia," at least if George Spencer could be induced to take the part of "Absolute."

That determined, she began to think of her costume. A quilted pink satin petticoat; a flowered white satin gown *à la bergère*, caught back in front, and cut low and square in the neck; a shepherdess-hat, daintily trimmed, and with flowing ribbons; silk stockings with clocks, and of a pale pink; high-heeled shoes, set off with glittering buckles; the least *soupçon* of rouge upon her cheeks. If George Spencer could

resist her so, indeed—indeed, she must give up the game as lost.

So vividly did this picture of her imagination present itself that it seemed too real to be untrue. In thought, she had already attained the goal. The shepherdess-hat melted into a wreath of orange blossoms; the costume *à la bergère* into a dress of pearl-white satin; the ladies of the company into bridesmaids draped in white watered silk and soft lace. The marriage bells rang out their peal. Her mother had wept upon her neck. The past was forgotten; the future loomed distinct—bathed in the rosiest hue.

For more than an hour Henrietta continued to build these airy castles. Then, returning to herself, she stamped the path irritably with her little foot—angered that she had been so weak. She consulted her watch, and found that it was after five; high time, in fact, to be turning her steps

towards the Cedars. And when, a few minutes afterwards, she stood beneath its stiff portico, she had recovered her usual calm, and felt equal to any emergency.

Ushered into the boudoir, she found Mrs. Spencer in the act of pouring out a cup of tea for George, who sat half-recumbent in an arm-chair, his hands clasped against the back of his head, and with a look of ennui upon his face.

“Ah, my dear,” cried the old lady, when she recognized Henrietta, “I’m fine and glad as you’ve come. It’s weary work to take one’s tea alone. George, there, has no sooner got the cup to his lips than he’s off to the billiard-room or stable—ne’er giving another thought to his old mother.”

“Nay; not so bad as that,” remonstrated George.

“A near friend to it then,” she insisted, regarding him nevertheless with a fond look

which belied the words. "You'll take a dish of tea, my dear?" she continued, turning to Henrietta. "And now, sit you down, and make yourself at home."

Which Henrietta did. And then Spencer handed her the tea, for which she thanked him with a look.

"Ay," went on the old lady; "young men are not what they were. Time was when they stuck to the desk; but now they're here to-day, and gone, the Lord knows where, to-morrow. I never saw such goings on i' my life—never."

"But George—Mr. Spencer, I mean," interposed Henrietta, blushing prettily at the liberty which she had taken with his name, "is attentive to business. "At least," she stammered, "everybody says so."

"There, mother!" said Spencer lazily, "I hope you are satisfied. And now, Miss Pigott, with your permission I will retire to the billiard-room."

“Going already, George?” exclaimed the old lady querulously.

“Yes, mother; at least, if you see no reason to the contrary.”

As for Henrietta, she felt chilled to the core. It would never do to let him escape her thus. Were he to leave just then, it might be a long time before she could find another opportunity so favourable to her purpose.

“Mr. Spencer,” she murmured, as he essayed to rise. And then she paused.

“Miss Claydon-Pigott,” he retorted, sinking back into his old position.

“Mr. Spencer,” she repeated softly. “I half came to thank you for the bracelet which you presented to me at the last archery meeting.”

“And to which you were fully entitled.”

Henrietta took no notice of his words. “I have felt,” she continued, “that my thanks must have appeared very cold. But

I shall always treasure it—always keep it,” she added in a low voice.

Spencer dallied in his chair. It would be rude to leave just then; to do so would look as if he were careless of her gratitude.

“Really, Miss Pigott,” he said, “you treat the matter too seriously. But for your great skill, the bracelet might have fallen into other hands.”

“In which case I could not have forgiven myself,” murmured Henrietta.

Then came an awkward pause—Spencer racking his brain to find a subject of conversation more to his taste; his mother dozing over her tea-cup.

Presently, the girl uttered a gentle sigh.

“Those dear days of summer have once more fled,” she said. “And autumn in Camptown is so very wearisome. No dances; no amusement, except the theatre or those interminable concerts; nothing to revive our drooping spirits until after Christmas.”

“You must not let Biagrasso hear you say that,” he remarked.

“I am tired to death of Biagrasso and sonatas, of oboes and first violins,” she exclaimed petulantly.

“Then I fear, Miss Pigott, that there remains but the theatre, with now and then a dinner-party.”

“One cannot go to the theatre more than two or three times in the season,” she urged, with another sigh. “And, as for dinner-parties, they are nearly, if not quite, as dull as Biagrasso and his symphonies.”

Spencer gazed abstractedly at his well-polished boots, feeling that his power as a comforter was exhausted.

“If we could get up some theatricals,” suggested Henrietta timidly. And then she paused, waiting to see whether the fish would rise to her fly. But no. Not yet—not at least without another throw.

“Theatricals are such great fun,” she

continued, 'making another cast. "They bring people together in a way that nothing else can. They are so delightful to look forward to, and leave such pleasant memories behind."

"Possibly," he returned. "But I have not tried the experiment."

Henrietta bit her lip. Was ever man so cold? Could nothing stir his blood? But, in no way daunted, she took fresh ground, and attacked him from another side.

"I have always thought," she said, "that I should like the stage as a profession. And you, Mr. Spencer! Oh, I am sure that you can act!"

Startled out of his apathy, George raised his face to hers, to find himself transfixed by a glance from her dark eyes.

"But the trouble, Miss Pigott, the trouble! Theatricals turn the house upside down from top to bottom."

"What's that about turning the house

upside down?" cried Mrs. Spencer, waking from her nap. "The Firm's not broke, is it, George? We shan't have to end our lives in the old cottage, shall us? Eh, but I'm always thinking as it may come to that."

George laughed. "No fear of such a thing at present, mother. Miss Pigott was suggesting theatricals, and I happened to remark that they would turn the house upside down."

"Thank God, it's no worse nor that," murmured the old lady.

"But theatricals *need* not create any disturbance," interposed Henrietta; "at least, if they are properly managed. Nothing could be easier than to run up a theatre outside the house—the auditorium to be entered through one of the drawing-room windows, and the stage to be connected with the billiard-room. And, Mr. Spencer, I should so like to see you act!"

“And you, Miss Pigott,” inquired George, who began to dream of future triumphs.

“Could you be induced to take a part?”

Henrietta raised her dark eyes once more to his, and then lowered them slowly.

“If you would like me to do so,” she replied.

“What do you say, mother?” cried Spencer. “Let us have your casting vote.”

“Will they keep you more at home, George?”

“Indeed, they will,” interposed Henrietta. “He will be wanted for rehearsal, week after week and day after day.”

“And will they bring you, my dear, oftener to the house?”

“I suppose so,” returned Henrietta, with a comely blush.

“Then be it as you wish, my love. And thank you kindly, if you can but make an old woman’s life a bit more cheerful.”

Henrietta did not reply. She was

touched by the other's lone condition. Worldly she might be, and that possibly until death, but she was not case-hardened, like her mother. She resolved, if she could attain her end, to persuade George to take a house near by, that she might spend an hour or two at the Cedars of an afternoon. She thought that, if once she were removed from her mother's indurating contact, she could become a better woman—possibly even a loving wife and good daughter-in-law. She trusted that it might be so; that it was not too late; that the past had not as yet destroyed all traces of her better nature, but that these would bud, and flower, and bear fruit when submitted to the influence of a more genial atmosphere.

George Spencer's thoughts were different to Henrietta's. They assured him that his intellect was above the average; that his mission in life was to rule, rather than to be ruled; that his mother, and, so far as that

went, his father did not appreciate him as he deserved to be appreciated; that no one had so truly gauged his capabilities as Henrietta. The girl had even discovered that in him lay buried the making of an actor, and it was pleasant to find himself so well understood. He regarded her attentively in the deepening twilight, and thought how pretty—nay, how beautiful—she was. He felt glad that these theatricals had been proposed. They would give him an opportunity in which to study her character, and then, if he found her worth to be as great as he began to think it must be, he might—might possibly——

But at that moment Mrs. Spencer cut short his meditation.

“You will remain for dinner, my love,” she was saying to Henrietta. “I’m sure Mr. Spencer will like to see your pretty face at table—won’t he, George?”

The girl appeared to hesitate. “You are

very kind," she said; "but perhaps I had better run home. Mamma will be getting nervous if I do not return soon. Dear me, how dark it is out of doors," she continued, with the prettiest of little shudders. "I had no idea that it was so late."

"You had better stop, Miss Pigott," said George persuasively.

"But mamma!" she murmured.

"Do not distress yourself on her account. I will write a line to say that you are dining here, and that some of us will escort you home." Saying which, and to avoid all further resistance, George left the room.

This time, Henrietta could endure to see him go. She had gained a first point of vantage, and was inspirited by success. Indeed, she had succeeded beyond her hope.

When Mr. Spencer came home, he put no stumbling-block in the way of the proposed entertainment. On the contrary, he favoured it, as providing a lever by which

to attain the one object for which he sighed. He possessed wealth ; he fared sumptuously every day ; in commercial circles he was esteemed an oracle ; and yet, he was not satisfied. He would stand on as lofty a pinnacle in society as he did on 'change, and his knowledge of the world enabled him to see that the projected theatricals would materially assist his purpose. The most exclusive people in Camptown would be sure to avail themselves of his invitation, and reciprocate his civility. So Mr. Spencer willingly assented to the scheme, making but one proviso—he was to be spared all trouble. He would give George a blank cheque, the signature which must constitute his sole liability.

“As to the pieces,” remarked George, when they were at dinner. “What do you say to ‘Betsey Baker’ for one, Miss Pigott?”

The suggestion did not at all coincide with Henrietta’s views. She had no inten-

tion of figuring upon the stage as a young washerwoman.

“Far too vulgar,” she said.

Tom Spencer thought that perhaps “Cool as a Cucumber” might do.

“Better,” replied Henrietta; “but its success depends upon a single character, and the company does not rejoice in a Mathews.”

“The ‘Area Belle’ is a good farce,” said George meditatively.

“But old and hackneyed,” retorted Henrietta.

She was difficult to please, and George looked sulky. He was not accustomed to have his ideas tabooed in so peremptory a fashion.

“Then propose something yourself!” he muttered almost rudely.

Henrietta shot towards him a timid, reproachful look.

“If you really want my opinion, I am in favour of a comedy, light in itself, but per-

mitting great scope in the matter of dress. Artistically conceived dresses can be made to cover a multitude of sins. I am sure that George—Mr. Spencer, I mean,” she added, correcting herself—“would make a perfect ‘Captain Absolute.’ Don’t you think so, Mrs. Spencer?”

The good lady did not in the least know what the conventional stage-attire of “Captain Absolute” might be. But from long experience she had learned to conceal ignorance beneath the garb of acquiescence.

“I’m sure he would make a perfect captain, my love. I’ve dearly longed to see him in regimentals.”

“He would not exactly be in uniform,” explained Henrietta. “But his hair would be powdered, and he would wear silk stockings. It is such a pity that silk stockings are out of date. Do you not think so, Mr. Spencer?”

George, happening to regard the shape of

his leg with admiration, began to think that the *rôle* of "Captain Absolute" would suit him to a nicety.

"But you, Miss Pigott!" he said. "What character do you propose for yourself?"

"I think that I could do 'Lydia' best," she answered, looking at her plate. "And Mr. Kidwelly Thompson would make a splendid 'Faulkland,' with Fanny as 'Julia.'"

"And what, may I ask, have you reserved for me?" inquired Tom.

"You will make a capital 'Bob Acres,'" she retorted.

"Rather hard lines, that," he remarked. "To the best of my recollection, Bob is neither brave in fight nor fortunate in love."

"But endowed with an assurance which no one can personate better than yourself."

"I pray you, be merciful," cried Tom, but without a vestige of ill-temper.

“Then,” continued Henrietta, “we can cast Mr. Copeland for ‘Sir Anthony,’ and Mr. Clegg for ‘Sir Lucius,’ and of the principal characters there will remain but ‘Mrs. Malaprop.’”

“What say you to Eva Bolitho?” queried George.

“Eva would come to every rehearsal attended by her mother,” objected Henrietta, “and Mrs. Bolitho would interfere in every question, however minute. In my opinion, we shall not require a chaperon, save and except Mrs. Spencer.” Saying which, the girl regarded that good lady with a look that was next of kin to filial.

“How would Miss Poppleton do?” suggested George, in an injured tone. Indeed, he felt that he had real ground of complaint. Henrietta had treated with contempt every suggestion which he put forth, and that in his father’s house and at his father’s table.

The girl perceived that by rejecting Miss Poppleton she might damage her cause. Besides, she did not so much fear Miss Poppleton, now that she herself was cast as "Lydia," for whom George Spencer would be compelled to express an at least fictitious admiration. No, on second thoughts, she did not dread her rival now that her own part in the play had been determined. After all, the other would but personate "Mrs. Malaprop"—a character to be laughed at, rather than made love to. So, after a slight hesitation, she replied—

"I think you have hit upon the very person, Mr. Spencer. And, with Mr. Copeland as 'Sir Anthony,' she is certain not to refuse."

A truly Parthian shot, and one which showed the girl to be, as in truth she was, a skilled diplomatist.

CHAPTER II.

FANNY CAPITULATES.

TIME, that evening, sped quite too fast for Henrietta. There was so much to arrange that the clock struck half-past the hour when she thought it to be barely ten. Springing from her chair at the sound, she declared that it was time to go.

“If you must, good night, my dear,” said Mrs. Spencer; “and be sure you come again soon. Th’ evening’s flown quicker than the clock, and George hasna been to the billiard-room since he left the table.”

“Good night, Mrs. Spencer,” said the girl, giving the old lady a kiss. “You are certain to see me in a day or two.”

“You won’t forget them letters?” continued the other, clinging to Henrietta’s hand, as though loth to part with it.

“Not on any account.”

“Then, good night, my dear, and may your dreams be all as I could wish ’em to be.”

Henrietta was touched, and for the second time that day, by this affectionate interest shown in her behalf. She pressed another kiss upon the old, yet unwrinkled brow before she left the room. If her mother had been thus kind, thus gentle, she could willingly have exchanged the perfect idiom of the one for the rough, but heartfelt language of the other. She could have wept upon her mother’s neck, and confessed her waywardness, if only that mother had been like Mrs. Spencer. But as it was, she shivered, and hoped for the time to come when her present home should be hers no longer.

“Good night, Mr. Spencer,” she said, offering her hand to George, as Bilhah opened the door in York Place. “Good night, Tom. I really think that I have cheered your mother a little.”

“I am sure of that,” exclaimed Tom.

“Good night to both of you,” she murmured. And then, hastening to her room, she bolted herself within.

Mrs. Spencer was not at any time much of a scribe, and, when she did commit herself to paper, her diction was apt to be ungrammatical. It was, then, a great relief when Henrietta promised to write to Miss Poppleton and Kidwelly Thompson, asking them to accept their parts, and when George undertook to secure Copeland and Ernest Clegg. Had they not done so, it is more than probable that “Mrs. Malaprop” would have found a very good exponent in real life.

Henrietta sat down to perform her part of

the contract after breakfast on the following day. First, she dashed off a few hurried lines to Kidwelly Thompson. The letter to him came easier than the other. It required nothing beyond a statement of facts, and a prayer for their favourable consideration. That to Miss Poppleton necessitated a more delicate touch.

To the Rev. Kidwelly she wrote—

“DEAR MR. THOMPSON,

“Mrs. Spencer has determined upon theatricals as a means of dissipating the tedium of a dreary autumn. The play she has selected is ‘The Rivals,’ and she begs me to mention that, in a full belief of your hearty concurrence, you have been cast for the part of ‘Faulkland.’ My sister Fanny is to play ‘Julia,’ and I need hardly say that she will be greatly disappointed should you decline to give us the advantage of your assistance.”

That done, Henrietta laid her pen upon the table, and sat buried in thought. It was not until after the lapse of several minutes that she commenced her letter to Miss Poppleton.

“MY DEAREST THEO,

“Such delightful news!—I can hardly contain myself for joy. We are to have private theatricals at the Cedars, and I am to play ‘Lydia’ to Mr. George Spencer’s ‘Captain Absolute.’ Does not the mere idea fill you with envy? Does it not make you wish that for the next few weeks you could be transformed into poor me? But you have not been forgotten, dear. We have cast you for ‘Mrs. Malaprop,’ and, had not another character fallen to my lot, I could have grudged you a part which is, no doubt, the most effective in the play. I can picture you now, as—averting your head and holding a fan before your blushing

cheeks—you exclaim, ‘Fy, fy, Sir Anthony! you surely speak laconically.’ By the bye, dear, Mr. Copeland is to play ‘Sir Anthony.’ Perhaps he is a trifle too young and good-looking; but, brought up in the country as he was, he will, I am sure, do the *rôle* full justice. But, joking apart, dearest, we both ought to be well satisfied with the characters which have been assigned to us, and grateful to Mrs. Spencer for an excitement which will tend to shorten the fog-laden hours so soon to come. Write by return of post and relieve an anxiety which, until your letter is received, will haunt the peace of your loving, affectionate,

“HENRIETTA.

“P.S.—If you do not say ‘yes,’ I shall *never, never* forgive you.”

Having perused her missives—dotting an “i” here, and crossing a “t” there—Henrietta sent them to the post. She felt that she had executed her commission

effectively, and that it would be difficult for either of the invited to decline. At all events, she could do no more, but must patiently await their replies. Nor was her anxiety to prove of any great duration. The morrow brought a letter of acceptance from Miss Poppleton, and Kidwelly Thompson in his own person.

After the receipt of Henrietta's letter, the reverend gentleman had been afflicted by certain qualms which, it is to be hoped, partly originated in his conscience, but were no doubt stimulated by thoughts anent expediency. He had grave fears as to whether it would be fitting in one of his cloth to appear, even on a private stage, decked out in parti-coloured garments. He longed to drink, yet hesitated to wet his lips. His sleep was visited by dreams in which he discerned himself to be making successful love to Fanny. Already she had accepted him with her eyes, and the word

“yes” trembled upon her bashful lips; when suddenly the scene was transfigured, and he stood in his pulpit, discoursing to empty benches. Rushing, horror-stricken, down the desert nave, his steps were arrested at the porch, on whose door, and written in characters of fire, he read his doom—“‘Twelve months’ suspension for deeds unworthy of his office, and by him done.” He awoke with a start, and found some consolation in the fact that, after all, this suspension was a dream. But the consolation was not thorough.

Daylight brought with it a sense of greater calm—a partial relief from his almost nightmare. And, following upon the retreating steps of the phantasies by which he had been so lately seized, came a redoubled and intense desire to lay his garland, as so many of his friends were about to do, at Thalia’s feet. He essayed to write, and by an acceptance of Mrs.

Spencer's invitation pave the way for long and blissful intercourse with Fanny. But his pen refused to formulate the necessary words. The question of expediency was scotched, not slain ; his dream of an empty church had left an after-taste.

Kidwelly was, in fact, held captive between the horns of a dilemma. Conscience whispered this ; love murmured that. Like Balaam, he hankered after the flesh-pots of Moab, and, like that prophet, attempted to serve two masters. The path to his front was girt by repellent, ice-bound walls ; whilst on either hand the sun played merrily. To an affable, afternoon-tea-table-frequenting man like himself the dancing beams were well-nigh irresistible. He first looked, then longed to sport him in the rays. He first dallied, then desired. He could not write—he could not bring himself to do that—but he would go and spy the land.

On the morning which succeeded that on which Henrietta despatched her letters, she was sitting, with her mother and Fanny, in the drawing-room at York Place, and her brow was lightened of a portion of its load.

Even Mrs. Claydon-Pigott was less sarcastic than of late, and an empty purse gave her less concern that it did two days before.

“It is so good of Theo to take the part of ‘Mrs. Malaprop,’ ” murmured Henrietta.

“And nothing could be in better taste than her reply,” pursued Mrs. Claydon-Pigott. “But, Henrietta, love, you have forgotten Dorothy and Mr. Ffrench. Are there no small parts which you could reserve for them?”

“Mrs. Spencer suggested their names yesterday. But we both agreed that they would be thinking more about each other

than of rehearsal. Engaged couples," she added, "are so very tiresome, and never at hand when wanted."

"Dorothy can have my part and welcome," exclaimed Fanny. "I shall break down, I know I shall. Mr. Thompson is so stupid."

"You will do what you are told, miss," retorted her mother.

"Fanny thinks that she could act better with Mr. Clegg as 'Faulkland,'" suggested her sister.

"I don't think anything of the kind," cried the girl tearfully. "It's too bad of you to speak such untruths, Henrietta."

"Well, dear, if you are not too enamoured of Ernest Clegg, I should advise you to set your affections on Mr. Thompson. You have treated him shamefully."

"What do you mean?" inquired Fanny between her sobs.

"He is desperately smitten, and yet you

must retire, forsooth, into quiet corners with Ernest, leaving Mr. Thompson alone and miserable."

"The living is worth at least five hundred a-year, with a house," murmured Mrs. Claydon-Pigott reflectively.

"And Ernest cannot pay his tailor's bill," suggested Henrietta.

"If he were really in love," continued Mrs. Claydon-Pigott, "he would work harder than he does. But not he! Mr. Clegg is idle to the backbone—and idle he will remain."

Poor Fanny. The case had never been presented to her in such plain colours. She entertained a certain fondness for the young artist, but knew that they could not live upon nothing. And "nothing" appeared to constitute the total of Ernest's worldly gear. Then, her affections were not irretrievably engaged; nor was it in her nature that they should be. But, if not deep, they

were soft and pliable. The tears of one moment were turned to smiles the next; and the voices of the present spoke more potently than the echoes of the past. She required a present arm on which to lean, a hand with which to toy, a sofa on which to lounge and read the last new novel. She would never give the man who might be her husband for the time being the slightest cause for jealousy; but then, one husband would be almost as another. So now, when weighing the vacuity of Ernest's purse against the despair to which the Rev. Kidwelly Thompson had been reduced—reduced, too, by herself—the scale preponderated in favour of the latter. And that most easily. She gave one little, fluttering sigh to the memory of her just-now swain, and yielded herself to the luxury of this new, prospective love.

Love, like that which Fanny experienced, grows rapidly. Akin to the resplendent

day-lily of new-world gardens, it blossoms in the morn; is in full beauty by noon; dies with the setting sun. And then the day-lily of Fanny's love had barely opened its eager petals. It took no heed of a coming night. It alone rejoiced in the first glow of sunrise.

"I am sure, mamma," she murmured, "that I am very sorry for Mr. Thompson; at least, if he cares for me so much as you and Henrietta think."

"Cares for you, child! There can be no doubt of that."

"If I could but think so, mamma." And with the suspicion that it might be so came a conviction that it was.

"Mr. Kidwelly Thompson," announced Bilhah.

"Mr. Thompson!" cried Mrs. Claydon-Pigott. "How good of you to come, and so early! Fanny, love, hand Mr. Thompson a chair. Or, stay, put your basket on the

foot-stool, and there will be room for both of you on the sofa."

"It is indeed kind of you to come so early," she continued, when her visitor had taken the assigned position. "And far more sociable. After lunch we are liable to an incessant stream of callers."

"Unquestionably," assented the rev. gentleman.

"And now we shall be more occupied than ever. Mrs. Spencer's theatricals will engross so much of the girls' time. You have heard about them, of course. And yet, how stupid of me to doubt it! Henrietta has, I know, written to you on the subject."

"It is on account of these very theatricals," stammered Kidwelly, "that I have ventured to intrude at so unseasonable an hour. The fact is, I—I almost regret that—er——" Then, noticing that Fanny's eyes were beaming upon him with an ex-

pression full of encouragement, he came to a dead stop.

“I trust,” interposed Henrietta in her sweetest manner, “that you do not think of refusing?”

“On the contrary. I assure you, Miss Pigott, that I—er——” And, in an access of nervousness, the rev. gentleman, who was on the point of committing himself irrecoverably, lost his black, soft hat beneath his clerical coat-tails, and, having found it, flattened it ruthlessly between his knees.

Mrs. Claydon-Pigott regarded him with contempt. Why could not the man keep his hands quiet, and come to the point? Yet, remembering the great stake which was at risk, she controlled the sarcasm which had risen to her tongue.

“I am afraid,” she said in her blindest tone, “that your hat is a troublesome companion. Fanny, love, put Mr. Thomp-

son's hat on a chair. And now," she continued, when Fanny had obeyed, "can I assist you in any way?"

"The fact is," returned Kidwelly, "that I feel some little hesitation as to whether it would be right to accept Mrs. Spencer's kind offer. It might be considered indecorous for a clergyman to appear on the stage. It might cause a scandal in some quarters."

"You mean that the bishop might not approve?"

"The bishop for one, certainly. But I referred more particularly to my flock."

"The greater part of which belongs to our set, I believe?"

"The greater part—yes," Kidwelly admitted.

Mrs. Pigott smiled. "That being the case, and speaking as a woman of the world, I think that you may dismiss all fear of consequences. The majority of

your flock will itself be invited, and—go.”

“But my cloth,” protested Kidwelly.

“Private theatricals have no sort of connection with the stage,” suggested Henrietta. “They are not to be mentioned in the same breath. In the one case you are thrown amongst ladies, in the other surrounded by actresses.”

“It is to be quite a family affair,” observed Mrs. Claydon-Pigott.

“And I, Mr. Thompson, am to be ‘Julia,’” observed Fanny.

Kidwelly felt drawn by the cords of love, and his dream was forgotten. He stole a glance at his charmer, only to experience the full force of her pleading eyes. He faltered. He yielded. The sun was dancing too merrily in the fields for him to resist its alluring beams.

“Should you very much like me to take the part of ‘Faulkland?’” he inquired.

“I could not act so well with any one else,” she murmured.

“And you feel sure, Mrs. Pigott, that it would not be wrong?”

“Wrong!” cried that lady. “Why should it be wrong? But you clergymen have such tender consciences—far tenderer, it would appear, than we women.”

“You will remain to lunch,” purred Henrietta. “We—that is Fanny and myself—are going to the Cedars this afternoon, to have a long talk with Mrs. Spencer, and to arrange about rehearsals. We think that the sooner our company is brought together, the better will be the result.”

“Undoubtedly,” assented Kidwelly.

“It will be great fun,” she continued. “Quite a family affair, as mamma calls it—one that will make us ten times more intimate than before. And, for my part, I do so prefer friendships to acquaintanceships.”

Kidwelly sighed. "I saw," he murmured,

"from yonder silent cave,
Two Fountains running, side by side,
The one was Mem'ry's limpid wave,
The other cold Oblivion's tide."

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Fanny.
"I do so dote on poetry. And you, too,
are fond of it, Mr. Thompson?"

Kidwelly explained that nothing gave him more pleasure than to sit with a poet in his hand "to lighten the languid way."

"Where is the heart," he inquired of Fanny,

"that would not give
Years of drowsy days and nights,
One little hour, like this, to live—
Full to the brim, of life's delights?"

She had never been so wooed. This was indeed to find deep calling unto deep. What were Ernest's timorous looks to this? What his so oft-repeated sighs when they had chanced to be alone? And

Fanny grieved to think of her wasted opportunities.

Ah well! Hers was but another form of that craze which had gyved Dorothy and Martin. Possibly her love was skin-deep when compared to theirs; but it was "an eternal April" when contrasted with the motives which determined Henrietta. If selfish, it was at least spontaneous; if lying upon the surface, it was not altogether calculating.

And so, these days of rehearsal sped quickly for the girl—far more quickly than the study of her part. She had not been an apt scholar when in the schoolroom; and, now that her schoolroom-days were past, the facility with which she could commit long passages to memory had by no means increased. At times, her more than common dullness, her frequent omission of the cue, caused even Kidwelly Thompson to lose heart and patience. None the less

he struggled on, buoyed by the hope of a success more lasting than any to be gained from "Julia's" troth.

"Really, Miss Fanny," he declared one day, "I think we should get on better were we to have a rehearsal or two in York Place. The presence of these other people would seem to confuse rather than assist your recollection."

"I think it does," said Fanny tearfully. "And I do so want to become perfect, Mr. Thompson!"

"Naturally—naturally. Suppose we try a rehearsal at your mother's to-morrow afternoon."

From which it resulted that on the following day Kidwelly presented himself at the house in York Place. Admitted to the drawing-room, he was received by Esther in place of Fanny. It was an unexpected pleasure, and one which he could have well forborne. He retained a lively

remembrance of her inquisitiveness, and of her great success as a marplot. Moreover, he had a morbid fear of hoydens. They wounded his most sensitive prejudices, and struck a blow at the root of his poetic temperament.

“It’s you, is it?” exclaimed Esther, as Kidwelly appeared. “Fanny has gone upstairs. You came to see her, I suppose?”

“Yes, Miss Esther,” said Kidwelly, attempting to take the girl’s hand.

“I don’t care to be pawed like Fanny,” she cried, retreating. “I hate men.”

“You hate men, Miss Esther!”

“Yes. I hate them—they are so stupid. But *I* know, Mr. Thompson. *I* know something,” she continued, skipping across the room—“something which you would like to know.”

How he did detest the child! And yet, his curiosity got the better of his detestation.

“And what is this great secret? Come, tell me, Esther.”

But she remained dumb.

“Come, tell me, Esther. There’s a dear girl!”

“How much will you give?” she inquired.

“A kiss. Nay, two—three—as many as you want,” he exclaimed, attempting to seize her as she flitted past. But again she evaded his touch.

“I don’t want kisses,” she cried, in high glee at the result of her manœuvre. “I hate kisses as much as I hate men. But *I* know—*I* know—and oh, it was such fun!”

Kidwelly longed for Fanny to appear. He was irritated, yet helpless. He would liked to have taken the girl by the shoulders and thrust her from the room. But he had not courage to execute his wish.

“It was such fun,” she continued. “I

was beneath the sofa one day when Fanny and Ernest were in the drawing-room, and thought themselves alone. I often hide under the sofa or behind the curtains, you know, Mr. Thompson. It's such fun to hear what people say."

"And what did your sister and Mr. Clegg say, eh, Esther?"

"They didn't talk much; but they kissed each other a great deal. Fanny *was* a silly to let Ernest kiss her like that! I wouldn't have let him, had I been in her place."

"Did it—did it happen lately?" stammered Kidwelly.

"Guess," retorted his tormentor.

"Was it before the theatricals were spoken of?"

"Oh, long before."

Kidwelly uttered a sigh of relief. That this little episode in Fanny's life had occurred so far back left room to hope that he had, since then, supplanted his rival.

Yet, he ought not to dally. Fanny was so sensitive to admiration, so willing to be wooed, that to trifle would be most dangerous. He felt that he must clench the matter, and that right soon.

Then, and to his great joy, Fanny appeared.

“I am so sorry,” she exclaimed, “to have kept you waiting. But I dare say,” she added, with a little blush, “that Esther has entertained you quite as well as I could have done.”

“She has been most amusing,” faltered the rev. gentleman.

“I have been telling him,” interrupted Esther, “that one day, when I was under the sofa, you and Ernest——”

Fanny blushed more deeply than before; but, despite her confusion, did what Kidwelly Thompson had just now longed to do. Seizing Esther by the shoulders, she ejected her from the room, and with so great force

that the colour which dyed her cheek might fairly be attributed to the exertion that she had undergone.

“It is so good of you to come,” she stammered. “I feel that we shall get on better than at the Cedars. And we are less likely to be interrupted.”

“But visitors,” objected Kidwelly. “They might be shown into the room at any moment.”

“Perhaps you would prefer the dining-room,” suggested Fanny.

Kidwelly followed his companion to the dining-room, and carefully closed the door. Then he peered beneath the table and peeped behind the curtains.

“What are you doing?” ejaculated the wondering Fanny.

“I thought that—that Miss Esther might have secreted herself about the room. She told me, a few minutes ago, that she was fond of doing so.”

“She is the most tiresome girl,” said poor Fanny. “Nothing can escape her curiosity.”

“Her curiosity will be at fault to-day,” returned Kidwelly, with a grim smile. “Unless, indeed, she puts an eye to the keyhole.” Saying which, he went to the door, and blocked that only means of espial.

“Now that we are safe,” he continued softly, “ought we not to begin? For, as you know so well, dear Miss Pigott,

“shadows come on, ’tis evening soon,
And, ere we can say, ‘How short!’ ’tis night.”

His soothing voice was so grateful, that Fanny would have preferred to listen to its poetry, whilst she dreamed on for ever.

“Perhaps you would not object to try that scene in the third act, where I am discovered alone—longing for you to appear. You remember the cue—*her impatient Faulkland counts the moments of her stay.*

Upon which, you enter, and say,—*I had not hoped to see you again so soon.*”

“Yes, I remember,” said Fanny. “*I had not hoped to see you again so soon, Mr. Thompson.*”

“You must not say ‘Mr. Thompson,’” he interrupted gently. “That is an interpolation. Try to recollect that I am ‘Faulkland.’ Then I reply,—*Could I, Julia, be contented with my first welcome—restrained as we were by the presence of a third person?*”

Fanny: “*O Faulkland, when your kindness can make me thus happy, let me not think that I discovered something of coldness in your first salutation.*”

“Very good,” exclaimed Kidwelly encouragingly. “But endeavour to say the words a little more as if you felt them.”

Kidwelly: “*’Twas but your fancy, Julia.*”

“I think that it would be more effective, Miss Pigott, if at this point I were to seize

your hand. But you must not give me yours like that. Not so demonstratively. You must let it hang by your side until I take it—thus.”

Kidwelly : “ *I was rejoiced to see you—to see you in such health. Sure I had no cause for coldness?* ”

Fanny : “ Indeed—indeed, you had not ! ”

“ Stop—stop, Miss Pigott ! You ought to say,—*Nay, then, I see you have taken something ill.* Perhaps, we had better try once more.”

“ If you like,” whispered Fanny.

And so they struggled through the scene,—Fanny forgetful that she was “ Julia,” or that her lover was “ Faulkland.” But, he had to take her hand so many times, looking the while so earnestly into her face, that she might fairly be excused her countless failures.

With each breakdown she grew more nervous. Her heart began to flutter pain-

fully. She could not control her twitching lips, nor the tears which dimmed her yielding eyes. To play at love like this was more than her soft heart could brook.

Nor did Kidwelly Thompson escape the contagion of the hour. Fanny's tears appealed to his poetic sympathies. He would liked to have stilled her fluttering heart and quieted her twitching lips; but dared not. He was of those whom nervousness compels to reticence; who, the greater be their hope, the less their courage.

"Come, Miss Pigott," he exclaimed, as the rehearsal was drawing to a close. "Do not forget the cue this time. *How shall I be sure, had you remained unbound in thought and promise, that I should still have been the object of your persevering love?*"

"Then try me now," faltered Fanny. "Let us be free as strangers as to what is past: my heart will not feel more liberty!"

The words were almost sobbed.

Kidwelly: "*There now! so hasty, Julia! so anxious to be free! If your love for me were fixed and ardent, you would not lose your hold, even though I wished it!*"

Fanny: "*Oh! you torture me to the heart! I cannot bear it.*"

Having said which, she gave him one pleading look, and, covering her face, sunk into a chair.

"Oh, Mr. Thompson!" she sobbed. "I shall never be able to do it. It seems so unnatural."

"Why unnatural?" he asked.

"Do not ask me—please do not ask me," she returned almost inaudibly.

"But I want to know," he said gently.

"Because—because—— Oh, dear! what shall I do? What will become of me?"

"Is it because you love me, Fanny? Because it is 'Love's hour to stray'? Because those eyes are truly mine, and

“When on others most they shine”

You “think they’re turned on me”?

Could she have heard aright? Were such lovely words in very truth addressed to her? She feared to speak, lest the hope might prove unfounded.

But he seized her hand, and deluged it with kisses. That was something tangible; something, the import of which there was no mistaking.

“Oh, Mr. Thompson!” she faintly murmured.

“Call me ‘Kidwelly,’” he said.

“Kidwelly! Dear—dear Kidwelly!” she whispered.

CHAPTER III.

HENRIETTA VICTRIX.

FANNY was supremely happy. She had found the strong arm on which to lean, the hand with which to toy. Each day the rehearsals with Kidwelly Thompson grew more delightful, and her grasp of the character, which at one time she had so vainly attempted to pourtray, more definite. Words, which it had been difficult to master from a book, came readily enough now that her lover acted as the medium betwixt them and herself. Ere long, she was able to consider him as "Faulkland" and herself as "Julia;" to condemn his pretended jealousy, and dote upon him in her heart, even whilst

blaming his coldness with her tongue. The unreal became insignificant in presence of the real; her part in the play subsidiary to her part in life.

Of course Mrs. Claydon-Pigott was lavish in the expression of her delight. Never had there been so devoted a daughter as Fanny, nor could the most anxious mother wish for a better son-in-law than Kidwelly Thompson would no doubt prove. "A clergyman, too!" as she remarked to Miss Lander, when that lady offered her congratulations. "It is one thing to marry a daughter well from a worldly point of view; it is another, and one far more precious to a mother's heart, to feel that her daughter is relegated to the Church—to be sustained by a hope that, in its bosom, the principles which she has so carefully instilled will not be forgotten."

But Mrs. Claydon-Pigott, whilst grateful for present mercies, was not altogether

satisfied with the measure in which they had been meted. She thought that it might have contained more; that room might have been found in it for a settlement of Henrietta's little affair. That still halted, and Mrs. Claydon-Pigott despaired of its successful issue. She had never been very sanguine about it, possibly because Henrietta would not allow her to interpose even her little finger, and now that it made no headway, she vented her disappointment by frequent innuendoes—comparing Fanny's good sense with the other's obstinacy; the former's attainment with the other's failure. And she did this so repeatedly as to cause Henrietta to detest the parental roof-tree more than ever, and to sigh wearily for a home of her own.

But, alas, that home was as yet *in nubibus*. George Spencer continued impregnable; nor could Henrietta blame Miss Poppleton. Instead of being a rival, dear

Theo had proved a friend. She had soon appreciated Henrietta's drift, and, like a good-natured girl, retired from the contest. She had money and to spare; Henrietta had none, and it would be a nice thing, argued Theo, if the girl could not only win George Spencer's heart, but share the benefit of his long purse. So, when an opportunity presented itself, she left the two together, retiring to another room or to some corner of the garden, there to rehearse in greater comfort with the future Sir Anthony.

In fact, Miss Poppleton at no time seriously entertained an idea of captivating young Spencer. Had he placed his hand and fortune at her feet, she would have refused the honour. It was pleasant enough to flirt with him in a ball-room—he could waltz well, and talk even better. But beneath the surface of his talk she had noted a current of agnosticism, and

agnosticism, in its every form, was so utterly at variance with her predilections, that, from that cause alone, she would have hesitated to unite her life with his. In Frank Copeland she had found a more congenial spirit; one cheery and good-tempered; a man who, if not so intellectual as the other, was passably good-looking. Then, he was poor; engaged in a sharp contest with the world. She pitied him, and began to think how hard his lot; to picture his dreary lodging, and to compare it with the home which he had once enjoyed. And pity—for so experience teaches—is but the preliminary to a warmer sentiment.

In fact, Henrietta's diplomacy had been fraught with good to all except herself. Yet she determined to persevere. These rehearsals, she reflected, were but the means to a greater end. The supreme moment on which she most relied had yet to come. So far, George Spencer had not seen her

in the costume *à la bergère*. But, when she stood before the footlights, when the theatre was crowded, then she would deliver the final onslaught, overwhelming in its unexpectedness—irresistible, she hoped, by reason of its intensity. She would not coldly simulate the character. It should be aglow with life, a personification of her very feelings.

But, as a means to so great an end, her dress must be unexceptionable.

“Mamma,” she said, on the afternoon of a certain Wednesday, and before taking her way to the Cedars for rehearsal, “I have determined to get my dress from London—from Madam Schlegel, of Little Gower Street.”

“Nonsense, my dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Claydon-Pigott. “Think of the expense.”

“You should have thought of that, mamma, before allowing me to accept the part.”

“Was ever mother troubled with such a thankless child!” sighed the good lady. “Miss Harrison’s last bill is not paid; but she might be induced to furnish what we want by the promise of a settlement next month.”

Henrietta shook her head. “Miss Harrison,” she declared, “could not make such a dress as I require. Theo is going to Madame Schlegel, and my dress must be every bit as good as hers.”

“We cannot afford it, dear. We cannot pay the sum she would ask.”

“I was not aware, mamma, that we were in the habit of making cash payments. I thought that we did not pay for anything until it could no longer be avoided.”

“Madame Schlegel will charge thirty or forty guineas,” objected Mrs. Claydon-Pigott.

A mere trifle, Henrietta observed, in view of the result which the dress might be expected to produce.

“Pshaw, my love! What have these rehearsals done in that direction? How often must I tell you that George Spencer will never come to the point?”

“And how often have I told you not to interfere, mamma?”

“If you could but be induced to take a leaf out of Fanny’s book!” sighed the good lady.

“Permit me to suggest,” retorted Henrietta, “that Kidwelly Thompsons do not grow on every hedge.” Then, seeing that her mother vouchsafed no reply, she added, “I shall write to Madame Schlegel this afternoon.”

Which, being a determined little body, she did. And yet, in spite of the bold front just now displayed, she neared the Cedars with a downcast heart. These so-often-repeated rehearsals were getting wearisome, and proving a great strain. If she had not as yet permitted a free rein to the expres-

sion of her love, she had done what to her was more difficult. She had contradicted George whenever it was possible to do so ; she had sided with Tom when questions as to the management of the play occurred ; she had ridiculed her lover's acting ; she had essayed to prove that, however it might be with others, she was not a girl to woo him with fair words or to fall prone before his wealth. It was a difficult game, and sometimes, as on this afternoon, she trembled at her daring.

Spencer was piqued and angered. He had never been so treated by any girl ; but, on the other hand, he had encountered none so pretty. He was attracted despite himself. He longed to subdue, whilst he felt himself to be subdued. If he appeared to gain a slight advantage one day, it disappeared the next—leaving behind a greater dissatisfaction than before, by reason of the glimpse which it had afforded of a happiness

which was still elusive. Of a morning, he would decide not to attend rehearsal that afternoon, to endure such treatment no longer. He would dine at the club, and after dinner join the fellows in the billiard-room. But, so surely as the appointed hour came round, he was at the Cedars, and that even before Henrietta.

This same Wednesday afternoon Henrietta was unusually difficult to please. It did not happen to be a day on which there was a full rehearsal, but she had come by special appointment to perfect a few of the scenes in which she was to play with George.

“Now, Mr. Spencer,” she said, when they had retired to the library, “if you are ready, we will, with your permission, assume the fender to represent the footlights.”

George made no objection.

“I begin,—*The licence!—I hate licence!*”

Spencer: “*Oh, my love! be not so unkind!—*”

“Stop!” she cried, raising two dainty fingers to her pretty ears. “How often must I tell you to put more fervour into the words, ‘Oh, my love!’ You speak them as though love were a thing to be played with, slighted.”

“*Oh, my love!*” began George once more; “*be not so unkind!—thus let me entreat*”——(kneeling).

Henrietta stamped her foot angrily upon the carpet. “Have you *ever* made love to a woman in real earnest?” she exclaimed. “And, if you have, did you drop on your knees like that, as though your legs were a couple of sticks, and your thoughts intent upon the sit of your trousers?”

“I shall do it right, Miss Pigott, when the evening comes. You are so desperately hard on a fellow.”

“And if I am, it is for a fellow’s good. There—let us try once more.”

“Much better,” she exclaimed, when he

had again fallen upon his knees. "Then, I say—*Psha ! what signifies kneeling, when you know I must have you ?* "

"I think," said George, rising, "and if you will allow me to hazard the suggestion, that you rather over-emphasize those words. You make them sound as though I were beneath contempt."

"A little exaggeration is sometimes a good thing," she retorted. "It brings down the house. Now, please, let us get on, or we shall never have done."

Spencer: *Nay, madam, there shall be no constraint upon your inclinations, I promise you. If I have lost your heart—I resign the rest.*"

At this point George sighed—a long, uncontrollable, unexpected sigh. He could not have checked it had he been offered a kingdom in exchange.

"Very good indeed," cried Henrietta roguishly. "That sigh was a capital piece

of acting, and makes an excellent foil to the "aside" which follows."

Spencer (aside): "'Gad, I must try what a little spirit will do."

"That will never bring down the house," she exclaimed. "Your tone gives no idea of determination. You could never master a wayward girl with a voice so dismal! Try once more—please do, Mr. Spencer."

This time he endeavoured to give the words a greater force, but with no large measure of success.

"Better," declared Henrietta, "although not perfect. But you have been very good and patient to-day," she continued, thinking perhaps that he had been sufficiently tortured.

"I have done what I could to please you," he murmured.

She darted at him a short, thankful look which effaced all memory of her previous

banter. Truly, he thought, she would be a glorious prize, if only he could win her love. But she would never love him for the sake of his wealth—that was quite clear now. Had money or position been her object, she would long ago have been at his feet. No. If presently she could be induced to accept his hand, it would be because he had conquered her heart.

Henrietta returned to York Place in better spirits than she had enjoyed for many a day. She believed that she was at last making progress. She felt almost certain now that the costume *à la bergère*, the glamour of the footlights, her self-abandon when on the stage, would prove irresistible. And she thought to have deserved success. It was long months since she had begun her campaign, long months since she had relinquished all pursuit of others in the hope of bringing George Spencer within her net. She had followed the plan which

she had first laid down with unflagging persistency. She had realized that the dropping of water weareth away stones, and it would be hard indeed if in her case the method of nature was to be inverted.

The theatricals at the Cedars became the talk of Camptown. Everybody was going, and everybody asked everybody else if they were invited. It was really very kind of Mrs. Spencer, they agreed, to take so much trouble for other people's amusement; but, no doubt, she wished to gain a better footing in society.

"I suppose, my dear, that you will be there," said Mrs. Bolitho to Miss Lander.

"Certainly. I shall go, if only to take care of Dorothy."

"So far, we have only interchanged formal calls," continued the other. "They are quite new people, you know, and Mr. Bolitho is so very particular."

"Mrs. Spencer, if wanting in polish, is a

thoroughly good woman," returned Miss Lander dryly.

"Unquestionably, my dear. But she has sons. And Evy is *so* young; we have to be so *very* careful."

"Mr. Spencer is said to be one of the richest people in the neighbourhood," suggested Miss Lander.

A rumour as to which Mrs. Bolitho was fully cognizant. But it is not at all times advisable to lay bare the breast.

At last came the eventful day. A commodious theatre had been erected on the lawn; tier upon tier of fauteuils occupied the auditorium; a chandelier, suspended from a tented ceiling of light-blue calico, gave a sufficient but not too-glaring light; an elegant proscenium, with a graceful drop-scene, the latter painted for the occasion, relieved the crimson hangings which draped the walls; a few performers, selected from Biagrasso's accomplished staff, constituted

the orchestra—neither expense nor trouble had been economized.

As Mr. Spencer *ainé* received his guests and led them to the fauteuils, his heart swelled with pride. His dearest wish had been fulfilled, and the *élite* of Camptown was thronging to his door. His commercial triumphs had become vapid through long proprietorship; his wealth had in a great measure ceased to gratify. But to-night he felt a new excitement, one after which he had vainly hankered, the keystone to that arch which it had taken so many years to build. He had never enjoyed the strains of Biagrasso's full band so much as he did the overture which was at that moment being played by the selected few. To him this sounded as a pæan dedicated to himself, forerunning him to the gates of high Olympus.

Mrs. Spencer carried her honours with greater meekness. She thought more of

the play than of the crowd which filled the theatre. She was in an agony lest the actors should forget their parts. She was feverishly excited as to the effect which George would produce upon the audience when he appeared in the magnificent attire of "Captain Absolute." She hoped that Henrietta would support him well, and that the pair would be vociferously applauded. In short, as Miss Landier had intimated to Mrs. Bolitho, her fond heart proved her to be a thorough woman.

The overture ceased, and the drop-scene was lifted. "Thomas" and "Fag" appeared upon the stage, and got through the first scene as best they could. Both were agitated. They were not very clear as to what to do with their hands. They endeavoured to conceal them in their respective pockets; but those auxiliaries to nervous men were in unaccustomed places, and not readily to be found. They

wished to Heaven that they had more thoroughly examined their coats and breeches before they came on. But it was too late to do so then. They must defer any such investigation until it was their turn "off."

The curtain fell amidst a general tittering of the audience, and, as it did so, Mr. Spencer looked daggers at the two delinquents. Mrs. Spencer trembled for the night's success. But not for long. In a couple of minutes a different scene was discovered—a dressing-room, furnished tastefully, in which were two good-looking young women, to all seeming unusually self-possessed. Henrietta, as "Lydia," reclined on a sofa, habited in the daintiest of *peignoirs*; whilst Bertha Graham, of Locksley-Archer fame, as "Lucy," stood waiting to receive her lady's commands. It was a perfect tableau, rendered doubly effective by the misdoings of "Fag" and

“Thomas.” The theatre resounded with applause; the actresses did not move until the applause had ceased. Then, Miss Graham spoke—slowly, pointedly, emphasizing each word correctly. This was, perhaps, the best of her scenes, and she was not one to miss an opportunity.

Presently Fanny entered, nervous, but with a bright light sparkling in her eyes. For Kidwelly stood in the slips, and had given her hand a last, long pressure as she left his side. For his sake she did her best, and got through her part without any serious mischance.

But, even so early in the evening, Henrietta was the cynosure of all. She was so cool and collected. She was so evidently self-contained. True, she brought down the house when she ordered “Lucy” to put “Peregrine Pickle” under the toilet, to open “Fordyce’s Sermons” at Sobriety, and to fling upon her lap “Lord Chester-

field's Letters." But the audience felt that there was more behind, and that it was in presence of an actress whose art would presently hold it spellbound. Nor had it misjudged her power.

She was on the stage with "Absolute"—he in the background, and she believing him to be a loathsome stranger. Suddenly he turned, and she recognized her lover.

"*Oh, heavens! Beverley!*" she exclaimed.

The words were simple ; but, coming from her lips, they sounded as a yearning, deep-drawn sigh, as typical of great bliss succeeding to despair.

Presently he embraced her.

"*Now could I fly with him to the antipodes!*" she cried, fastening her eyes upon his face both long and earnestly. "*But, alas,*" and here she interpolated a word to enhance the effect, "*my persecution is not yet come to a crisis.*"

Her voice sunk almost to a whisper. The

change in her manner was so pathetic, the contrast between a heartfelt expression of the deepest love and the dying wail which followed it so vast, that the audience was electrified—held dumb, until at length it broke forth into round after round of unrestrained applause. If this were acting, what could be reality? If this could be accomplished on the stage, what more could be done in the cabinet?

There could be no difference of opinion, —the girl had made a hit. Her entries were anticipated, her exits proved triumphant, and that without exception, until she had spoken her last word, and the curtain had fallen for the last time.

“Clever girl, that,” remarked Mr. Grierson to Mr. Bolitho. “As good an actress as I have seen for years.”

“Very,” said the other. “She would make a fortune on the stage.”

“I trust that you have enjoyed yourself,

Eva darling," purred Mrs. Bolitho. "It was exceedingly well done for amateurs, don't you think so, Miss Lander?"

"Exceedingly."

"Perhaps Miss Pigott was a *little* too *prononcée*. I should have been on thorns had Eva been in her place. But, then, Mr. Bolitho would not have permitted such a thing. He is so *very* particular—far too particular, as I often tell him."

Neither of which criticisms reached Henrietta. She was refreshing herself in the "green-room" with a cup of iced chocolate. She was conscious of having acted well, and of having thrilled the audience. Nay, more. She felt sure that George Spencer at length realized that were he to press his suit it would not be in vain. She had ceased to torment him—to do so could no longer serve her purpose. Instead, she hung upon his words, looked timidly into his face, faltered when she addressed him.

Her mien indicated that she was conquered, that her heart was no longer free, that she had given all she had to give.

And yet Spencer did not respond. He appeared self-engrossed—preoccupied by thoughts far different to those she could have wished. His manner was so cold that he might not have been thinking about her at all.

Henrietta shuddered. Was the cup of happiness to be dashed from her lips at the very moment in which she hoped to taste its sweetness? Had she, by betraying her love too soon, rendered it a common thing, of no value, to be lightly toyed with and then rejected? If so, her long campaign had been worse than useless. Her conduct on the stage had been too *prononcée* to escape observation. She would be pointed at as a girl who had attempted to make a good match, but who had failed in the attempt; who had taken her goods to

market so often that they had lost their freshness.

As she so thought, Spencer approached the couch on which she sat.

“Miss Pigott,” he said, “they are waiting for us in the dancing-room. We actors, you may remember, open the ball with a quadrille, in which we are to appear *en grand costume*.”

“I remember,” she said dreamily. And then, rising, she took his arm.

They scarcely exchanged a word so long as the quadrille continued. Spencer was preoccupied, and Henrietta sick at heart. She knew that many an eye was turned towards her, curiously; that she was the centre of attraction; and that it behoved her to look unconcerned. Fortunately she still wore rouge, and was thankful that it had not been removed. The fictitious colouring enabled her to sustain her part creditably, and, when the music ceased,

she had no reason to believe that her agitation had been discovered.

She was animated by a faint hope that George might speak some words of comfort when the quadrille had come to an end, and they were strolling together about the hall or sauntering in the conservatory. But no. Leaving her close to the billiard-room door, he darted up the staircase.

She could scarce restrain the tears of disappointment, and felt that at any moment they might overflow. Passing through the billiard-room, she entered the green-room where, but a short while ago, she had been so elated. She sank upon the sofa, and, stimulated by her loneliness, burst into hot, scalding tears of discontent. The place was littered with neglected properties; the gas was lowered; everything appeared no less forsaken than herself. But an hour before she had queened it on the stage, drunk in the applause excited by her acting,

gazed in her lover's eyes, and made sure that victory had crowned her efforts. Whilst now—— But this would never do. Her absence would soon be discovered, and no one, it little mattered who, must find her there—alone and weeping.

Meanwhile, George Spencer, hurrying up the stairs, had entered his room and carefully closed the door. Then, going to the dressing-table, he opened a small drawer, and extracted therefrom two morocco-covered cases—the one much larger than the other. He pressed the spring of the first, and disclosed a bracelet, shaped after a serpent, the head studded with diamonds, whose brilliancy was enhanced by two dark-green emeralds which formed the eyes. 'This he put carefully in the breast-pocket of his coat.

Then he opened the smaller case, and discovered a diamond hoop, whose every stone was of the first water. He looked

at it doubtingly. He did not take it from its case, as he had done the bracelet, but stood in deep reflection. Could he have mistaken the girl's looks that night? Could he have read her tell-tale eyes amiss? Could he have been dreaming when he fancied at last to have won her love? He recalled her every gesture, each soft inflection of her voice, each tender gleam of her dark eyes. And apparently he was satisfied. He took the diamond hoop from its case, and concealed it in the pocket of his waistcoat.

Henrietta had not moved from the green-room. She did not hear his footfall on the carpet, and only when he spoke did she become conscious of his presence.

"Here!" he exclaimed in surprise. "I have been looking for you everywhere, and no one could tell me where to find you."

She could not speak. She felt that she

must break down were she to try. She did not even glance towards his face.

Taking the bracelet from his pocket, he raised her hand, and, passing the bauble round her taper fingers, settled it upon her wrist.

Henrietta noted that something glittered on her arm ; but her eyes were dim, and she was unable to discern the richness of his gift.

“Please accept that trifle,” he whispered, “as a memento of the last few weeks. As for myself, I shall never forget them. They will remain graven on my heart.”

Could she have heard aright? Had she, then, despaired too soon?

“They will remain graven on my heart,” he repeated. “If at times they were difficult to endure, at times they were fraught with happiness. And now—but the happiness survives. They will recall the memory of one who, despising wealth,

treated me as I deserved; whose presence has gladdened my mother's heart, who has made her life brighter."

"Oh, Mr. Spencer! Stop—please stop," cried the girl. "You think better of me than I deserve."

In spite of which remonstrance, George continued.

"To-night, I fancied that you looked upon me more kindly; that your eyes expressed a love which I have often sought; that my hope was not quite vain."

She raised her face timidly—the tear-drops still bedewing her dark lashes.

"Have I been too bold, Henrietta?"

"What is it that you wish, Mr. Spencer?"

"Will you accept this ring, in token that you are mine, and that I am yours?"

"George! Do you know what you are saying? Have you no doubt lurking in your heart?"

"I have no doubt—no fear," he said

proudly. "But you! Tell me, dearest—are you quite, quite sure that I can make you happy?"

"Sure—quite sure."

He placed the ring upon her finger, and caught her to his arms. He was certain that he had drawn a prize; that he had found a wife who would be true, who would adorn his home, and sparkle in the world.

And she—well, she determined to become a better woman, to love the man whom she had so boldly won, to cherish her future mother-in-law, to be more patient with her mother. And, when Henrietta was determined, she rarely failed.

They sat a few delicious minutes—minutes whose full ecstasy could never be repeated, until suddenly the girl raised her head from George's shoulder, and said—

"But mamma! She will be wondering what has become of me."

“Let us go and tell her what we have done,” he said gaily. “Do you think that she will be surprised, dear?”

“I think so.”

They found Mrs. Claydon-Pigott in a corner of the library, and, happily for their purpose, alone with Fanny.

“Sitting by yourselves!” cried George. “I am afraid you must be tired.”

“No, not tired,” she returned graciously. “Kidwelly has gone to change his dress—nothing could induce him to appear as ‘Faulkland’ a moment longer than could be helped. So, Fanny and I are waiting his return.”

“How do you think that the piece went?” he inquired.

“It could not have gone better, Mr. Spencer. But, Henrietta, love, I have not seen you for ages. Where *have* you been?”

“She has been receiving the reward of merit,” exclaimed George, forestalling

the girl's reply, and displaying the bracelet upon her arm.

Mrs. Claydon-Pigott stared at it with open eyes.

"But see!" he went on, before the good mother could express her thanks, and pointing to the ring which sparkled on Henrietta's finger. "Not content with that, she must needs have something more—in exchange, I believe, for a heart which she has lost somewhere upon the road."

"You do not mean to say—you cannot intend to imply that——"

"That we are engaged! In truth, I do—at least with your consent," he added. "And it was to obtain that we came to find you."

George was not kept in long suspense. Mrs. Claydon-Pigott's assent did not tarry. She kissed her daughter affectionately, shook her would-be son-in-law warmly by

the hand, and then permitted them to seek Mrs. Spencer.

“After all,” she thought, as they left her side, “Henrietta is a far cleverer girl than Fanny.”

CHAPTER IV.

TWO LETTERS.

HENRIETTA's perception of what constitutes a pure morality might not be the most vivid, but, none the less, she had caught a glimmering of the truth. She aspired to develop into something better than she was. Her pursuit of George Spencer might at one time have been exclusively incited by selfish considerations, but it eventuated in an almost forgetfulness of self, and in a desire to do her duty. The mainspring by which she was impelled might not be of the best material, but it approximated thereto so nearly as to urge her towards a higher level.

Nor was Henrietta after her kind worse

than many another after his kind. Morality—or, for that matter, every and each of the cognate virtues—as apprehended and practised, is comparative rather than positive. “Purer than his fellows” would be more accurately descriptive of the best of men than “pure;” “more truthful than the bulk of his generation” an apter term than “truthful.” “There is a certain sense in which moral distinctions are absolute and immutable. There is another sense in which they are altogether relative and transient.”

No. Henrietta was not worse, she was better than those who would debase what little they retain of good, whose sole gratification is self-indulgence. These are fools, wallowing in their folly; degraded spirits, miserable when they think to enjoy. For, as all adjectives admit of comparison—some to mark a greater perfection, others to accentuate a greater declension—so it is

with men. Men, when they are compared, must rise above, or sink below, the moral status which they held a day, a week, a month, a year before. None can avoid the result attaching to such comparison. All have volition, and all must advance or retrograde. To do either is in their power, but to remain stationary has not been given to them. And, that being so, many prefer to retrograde.

Among the latter was Fleming. Since the day on which Minnie dismissed him from her room, his spite had grown, nor ever ceased to grow. It was directed not only against the girl, but against Martin. Both had done him an equal wrong; each in their several ways had frustrated his self-indulgence. Nor was he one to forget. He rather nursed his fancied grievances, hugged them to his breast, and swore to be avenged.

Being an apt dissembler, he gave no

outward sign of the volcano which raged within. Only—he could not smother its fires for ever; sooner or later they must burst forth, and possibly to his own detriment. He knew that right well, but was undeterred. For the fear of self-immolation cannot restrain the criminal whose blood is afire. He will do, even must he die. He may gnash his teeth when reflecting upon his shortlived power; but he elects to reign whilst to reign is possible.

Fleming had not been content with one visit to Minnie's lodging. He had gone there repeatedly, each time to be refused admittance. He had watched her door of an evening when his work was finished for the day, but with no result. He had neither caught sight of her trim figure as it left or entered the house, nor distinguished its shadow falling upon the blind. And at last he knew that the bird had flown.

He went to the "den" in Tib Street with a like success. The girl's corner by the fireplace was vacant, and the studio no longer echoed her rippling laugh. He dared not—so careful was he to avoid suspicion—inquire when she had last been there, or why she was not in her usual place. Not that he much cared to inquire. He fancied that he knew too well whither she had gone—to some pretty, far-distant cottage prepared by Martin, where she could be hidden from other eyes, and where it would be vain to seek her.

But one afternoon, when there happened to be a full gathering at the studio, George Spencer came. He had not been near it for the last few weeks, Henrietta and rehearsal having occupied both his thoughts and leisure. He had always liked Minnie, and soon noticed that her seat was vacant.

"Hallo, Ernest!" he exclaimed. "Where is the girl? Not ill, I hope?"

"I've no idea what has become of her," returned Ernest sulkily. "She has not been here for days."

"Not ill," Martin hastened to say. "But she thinks it a waste of time to come so often. She is right, too," he continued energetically. "We all dawdle away too many hours in the place."

"And when did she arrive at so wise a conclusion?" inquired George.

"When? Oh, a few days ago."

"Without any assistance on your part, I presume," suggested the other ironically.

Martin coloured. "Well, no—not exactly. But she is all right, and as busy as a bee."

"I say, though," cried Copeland, laughing, "you seem to have been going it rather strong in that quarter."

"Doing the bosom friend, the *fidus Achates*, the all-in-all," sneered Ernest, who regretted the loss of his model.

“But what have you done with her, man?” inquired George.

“Better not be too curious as to that,” interrupted Copeland. “No doubt he has found a snug thatch beneath which to conceal her pretty face.”

“Nonsense!” said Martin.

“Then, where is she?” persisted George.

Martin was annoyed. Would they give him no credit for his good intentions? And by what right did they submit him to so severe a cross-examination?

“It’s no business of yours, Spencer,” he retorted warmly. “The girl is in safe hands, and doing better for herself than were she to continue her visits to the den.”

“As you most sapiently observe,” said the other dryly, “it’s no affair of mine.”

“Nor of mine,” echoed Copeland.

But the coterie shrugged its shoulders, and indulged in covert glances more or less significant.

It was a great misfortune for Martin that the Globe-trotter did not happen to be present. He would no doubt both have curbed his temper and caused him to be more explicit, have extracted the truth, and made his good intentions clear. But he was not there, and, most unfortunately, Fleming was.

The latter had not spoken a word, but sat with eyes intently fixed on Martin's face—heeding his every tone, noting his every look. Martin had confessed to a knowledge of Minnie's whereabouts, and to having inveigled her away. He had refused to disclose either where she was or the nature of her employment. He had been confused, irritated—his manner alone was sufficient to demonstrate his guilt. At least, so Fleming argued, and so it pleased him to believe.

On leaving the studio, the manager turned into a quiet street, and entered the bar-

parlour of a modest, old-fashioned inn, to which of late he had often resorted. There he fortified himself with two stiff glasses of brandy, the first of which he swallowed "hot with," the second "neat." That done, he made for the office, and threw himself into Mr. Nesbitt's chair. He should have the place to himself that afternoon; for Martin, he knew, would not again return to Fosset Lane. He should have time in which to brood over his grievances and to meditate his plans.

For half an hour or more he brooded over his grievances, each minute thus spent causing them to assume a deeper dye. Little by little they so engrossed his soul as to drive therefrom all other thoughts. He hated Martin, he hated Minnie, he hated even Dorothy, and he revelled in his hate. Revenge held him in a firm grip, and in that hour was his only god. His only god! Aye, one by whose dread help to acquire an

“unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield.”

It matters little whence came this god, or how it had developed so fell a power. To trace the origin of evil is impossible. But evil has been, is, and will be—holding men in its claws, blinding them to what is good, driving them to destruction. The which, if any, pretend not to understand, then, as Gombauld remarked to Richelieu, when the latter failed to comprehend his verses, “That is not my fault.”

So now, the false god which sought to wreck his life stood at Fleming's side, whispering in his ear insidious counsel which fell upon an only-too-retentive soil. The manager had been his own master for so long, and was so unaccustomed to contradiction, that his grievances had ploughed deep furrows, leaving the surface of his

heart in good tilth for the noxious seed with which it was being scattered.

“Why should the fellow enjoy his will unchecked?” muttered Fleming. “Why should he be permitted to bask in the smiles of two fair women? Why should he be treated with honour, when by his conduct he deserves to be met with scorn?”

And the tempter at his elbow replied, “Ah, why indeed?”

Regarded from the standpoint which Fleming had chosen to adopt, the questions which he thus put to himself appeared to admit of but one solution. And such would have been the case had his standpoint been situate on a true base. But the manager knew that it was not so situate. He had studied Martin's character too thoroughly to believe that he could lie. Indeed, had not Martin stated that the girl was in safe hands? Fleming knew that the words were true; but the knowledge that they were

so did not mitigate his hate. It rather fanned its flame to think that the other should have resisted a temptation to which he himself would have succumbed so willingly. Even under temptation Martin had proved himself the nobler, better of the two.

Then once more spoke the tempter—ready with his fallacies so sweet and apt.

“That she is what she is,” whispered the vindictive god, “can be no concern of yours. That lies between the other and herself. But, consider. The man has robbed you of a love which otherwise had been your own; has hidden your love away; has, not only in that, but always frustrated your every purpose. Against you he has sinned most grievously.”

Aye, that was it. He had prevented an intended wrong, and therefore ought not to be forgiven; therefore must be made to suffer.

But how made to suffer? Fleming pon-

dered the matter long time and anxiously before he lighted on a solution which was altogether satisfactory. At last he found one. Martin himself had placed in his hands the key; it only remained to use that key so as to produce the greatest effect. He had pleaded guilty to the indictment, but had not justified his conduct. In this consisted the weakness of his position; and on this side he could be best attacked.

Fleming placed a sheet of common note-paper on the desk, and selected one of the worst pens which he could find, one that spluttered, and which at another time he would have rejected.

“Honoured Sir,” he wrote. “I am a well-wisher to your family, and cannot see things going on as they is. I esteem your honoured daughter, and cannot bear to think as she is about to fall into the hands of a villain. Sir, Mr. French has got another love, down in the country. He

keeps her close, but others beside myself knows it. It's common talk among the young gentlemen. Ask them, sir, and see whether I be lying. I've only heard a few words about it onest, but them as goes to Mr. Clegg's painting-room knows all. Sir, I've seen your honoured daughter a many times when I've been at Barton Church, and I shouldna like her to come to trouble."

Fleming gloated over each word as it was written. It was just the letter, he thought, to have been composed by some warehouseman or messenger who had been the hidden witness of a conversation which it was not intended that he should hear. His usual handwriting was stiff and formal, one amidst a thousand fellows, and which could easily be disguised. He looked at the letter when finished, and felt that detection would be next to impossible. But he must post it himself. It would never do

to submit it to the curious gaze of the clerks—in that case it might be remembered, and rise up in evidence against him at a future day. No; he would put it himself into the box, and that at once, for fear of any, at that moment, uncontemplated accident.

Seizing his hat as he passed through the lobby, he rushed into the street. The atmosphere was drear and fog-laden as his own conceptions. The garments of those who had been exposed to its influence emitted a steamy vapour. Everything was dank; everything tended to depress. At least, so thought Fleming, until, forcing his way through the crowd, he stood for a second time that afternoon before the modest, old-fashioned inn. There he recruited his drooping spirits after the former manner, except that on the present occasion he added a second “neat” to the prescription. Then, having once more taken to

the streets, he dropped his letter into a box at the central office.

It happened that Mr. Grierson, although by no means a bad-tempered man, was occasionally visited by attacks of irritability which interfered with his digestion, and consequently with his judgment. And, on the morning of the day which followed the despatch of Fleming's letter, he was suffering from one of these. The cook had put too much curry-powder into the prawns; the coffee was not so strong as it should have been; and, worse than all, a new butler—thinking to prove his zeal—had placed the letters on the breakfast-table, instead of taking them, as the custom was, into the study.

Whether they were placed on the breakfast-table or in the study could not make any real difference. In either case they must be opened. But middle-aged gentlemen are particular, and like the world to

progress after a method of their own. So it was with Mr. Grierson. He had contracted a habit of opening his letters in the study, and resented their being placed before him on the breakfast-table. In the former case, and in their absence, he could regard them with indifference ; lying under his very nose, his fingers itched to tear them open. He became eager to learn what report Smith had to give about Robinson, or what reply Jones had sent as to Brown's stability. And this morning, in consequence perhaps of the hot prawns which still warmed his palate, his anxiety respecting Brown's stability could not be repressed. Jones happening to write a most villanous hand, he turned over the pile at his elbow until he came to an envelope which, from its utter want of caligraphy, would appear to be the one he sought.

He broke the queer-looking seal, which had no doubt been superadded the better

to preserve its contents from inquisitive eyes, and proceeded to extract the information which he so greatly desired. Evidently this was not of a pleasing nature.

“The scoundrel!” he cried passionately.

“Papa!” said Dorothy. “Don’t use such strong language.”

“It’s enough to make a man use strong language!” he exclaimed. “But, there—read it yourself,” he continued, flinging the letter into his daughter’s plate.

Needless to say, it came from Fleming, and Dorothy weighed its every word—from the very first to the very last. As she did so, an angry flush overspread her face.

“He is indeed a scoundrel,” she murmured.

“And must be forbidden the house,” chimed in her father.

“Has he ever been here?”

Mr. Grierson regarded her with surprise.

“Been here!” he exclaimed. “Martin! What can you be dreaming about, child?”

Dorothy laughed softly. “I was not alluding to Martin, but to the person who wrote the letter.”

“It matters very little who wrote the letter,” he retorted. “The first thing we have to do is to forbid Martin the house; unless, which I very much doubt, he can refute the charge.”

“Papa!” cried Dorothy. “Surely you do not attach any importance to the words of a man who has not dared to disclose his name.”

But Mr. Grierson had great faith in his own discernment, and then the over-curried prawns had not ceased to stimulate. “Where there is so much smoke,” he returned, nodding his head sagely, “there is usually a little fire. And what the amount of that fire may be it is my duty to ascertain.”

Dorothy knew that any attempt to divert her father from the course which he had chosen would be useless. She could but temporize, and endeavour to prevent him from writing a hotly worded letter to Martin whilst the present attack of irritability was in the ascendant.

“I think,” she said gently, “that the best plan would be to show the letter to Mr. Copeland. I feel sure—even supposing there to be a grain of truth in the accusation, which I do not for one moment admit—that he will be able to put the matter in a different light. Mr. Copeland is, I know, a frequenter of the studio. Go to him first, papa, if only to please me.”

Fortunately, or so at least Dorothy thought, the plan happened to coincide with Mr. Grierson’s views. Although greatly incensed against Martin, he plumed himself on being just. If glad to have found a subject on which to vent his

irritation, he did not for that very reason wish to discard it too hastily. Rather, he would play with it, feed upon it, until he had become thoroughly satisfied with his sound judgment and strict sense of right. And a visit to Frank Copeland appeared to be the very thing that would enable him to do all that he proposed.

Dorothy watched her father, as he left the house, with a smile upon her lips and a mind completely at ease. She was even glad that the letter had come—glad that such an opportunity had occurred for proving her lover's worth. She knew his character to be so noble, so honourable, that she was quite sure the letter contained a lie, and that Martin would leave the dock without a stain upon his name.

“Poor dear papa,” she murmured. “At times he takes such queer fancies into his poor dear head.”

Be that as it might, the first thing which

Mr. Grierson did upon reaching his office was to obtain the Directory, and hunt up Copeland's address. Then he set forth upon his errand—a detective spirit in his breast, the ill-omened letter tightly grasped in his hand.

It was the first occasion on which the great merchant had set foot in Copeland's place of business, and although much surprised to see him, the young man felt a keen interest at his appearance. He trusted that it might help to swell the profits of a year which had been anything but satisfactory, when regarded from a purely commercial point of view. But in this he was doomed to disappointment.

“Good morning, Mr. Copeland,” said the visitor, taking a chair with that peculiar nonchalance which wealth, perhaps unconsciously, assumes in the presence of those less fortunate. “Can I have a few words with you in private?”

“Certainly,” replied Copeland, discreetly closing the door of the office in which they sat.

Mr. Grierson hesitated and coughed. “I have come upon a most distressing piece of business,” he at length began, “of quite a family nature, and in regard to which you may be able to render me valuable assistance. This morning I received a letter—an anonymous letter, I am bound to admit—reflecting most seriously upon Mr. Ffrench’s conduct.”

“Then I’ll undertake to say that it contains a falsehood,” exclaimed Copeland. “Ffrench is the very soul of honour.”

“Perhaps you had better read it,” returned the other dryly.

Copeland took the letter, and, as he perused it, a look of embarrassment appeared upon his face.

“It’s—it’s a most extraordinary production,” he stammered. “Who on earth can have written it?”

“I don’t care a five-pound note about the writer,” said Mr. Grierson coldly. “I want to know whether it is true.”

Frank made no reply.

“You will observe,” continued the other, “that it recommends me to apply to the young gentlemen who frequent Mr. Clegg’s studio, and of whom I believe you to be one.”

Copeland could have wished himself at the bottom of the sea. He was of a too-truthful disposition to prevaricate, and, whilst feeling that he knew but half the truth, he saw clearly enough that Mr. Grierson would consider the half which he did know to be confirmatory evidence. Then, what could have induced the man to appeal to him rather than to any other frequenter of the “den!”

As to the latter point, he was soon to be enlightened.

“I have come to you, Mr. Copeland,”

pursued his visitor, "because I know you to be a gentleman, and feel that my confidence is not misplaced. I have come to you because I am assured that our conversation will not be made a subject for gossip."

Frank bowed.

"Now, sir, tell me frankly, do the charges in that letter rest on a solid basis? And, if so—what may that basis be?"

The younger man crumpled the letter between his nervous fingers until it lost all semblance of its former self.

"Now that you have mastered its contents," interrupted the other anxiously, "might I request you to return the communication. It may prove a valuable document."

Copeland did so, and, striving to put Martin's conduct in the best light, commenced his tale.

"I believe," he said, "that the case lies in a nutshell. There was a pretty girl—

yes, she was a very pretty girl," he muttered *sotto voce*—"who used to come to the studio, and whom we had been in the habit of meeting there almost every afternoon. Of a sudden she came no more. We were astonished, and feared that she might be ill. But Ffrench said 'No,' that she was in safe hands, and that he had counselled her to absent herself. In which he was right," added the young fellow, "for the studio is hardly the sort of place to do a young and pretty girl much good."

Copeland began to think that, after all, Martin's conduct did not appear so very reprehensible, and that the tangled cover was giving place to an open country. But he was ignorant of the detective spirit which animated his companion.

"Of course you inquired what had become of the girl," suggested Mr. Grierson.

"Of course," returned Copeland airily.

"And he told you?"

“He said that her whereabouts was no business of ours, but that she had determined to discontinue her visits to the studio.”

“Now, let me ask—and I put the question as a man of the world—did it not occur to you as very strange that Mr. Ffrench should take upon himself to secrete this girl, and refuse to give the least intimation as to where she might be?”

“Well—yes,” admitted Copeland unwillingly; “it did appear rather strange.”

“Not only ‘rather,’ but ‘very,’ I should think,” persisted his interlocutor.

“‘Very’ would no doubt be the right word if the conduct of most men were in question,” stammered the other. “But, as I said before, Ffrench is the soul of honour, and would scorn to tell a lie. He said that Minnie was in safe hands.”

“Minnie is the young lady’s name, eh?” exclaimed Mr. Grierson in a tone

which made it evident that he thought to have scored a point.

Copeland was vexed at the turn which the conversation had taken. He perceived that his efforts on Martin's behalf had been useless, and that his visitor had a firmer belief than ever in the latter's delinquencies. It was annoying that he should have come at all, but more especially annoying that he should leave under the influence of such bad impressions.

"Let me assure you," he said, "that the girl is in every respect a good girl."

"That may be," replied the other calmly; "but it remains to be proved. In the mean time, I am truly obliged by your candour—a candour for which I shall ever feel grateful."

Having delivered himself of this polite little speech, Mr. Grierson retired, leaving Copeland a prey to reflections which were anything but soothing.

From Copeland's office the worthy merchant proceeded to his own, thoroughly imbued with an idea that the letter, which he still grasped in his hand, was a most veracious document. All that he had just now heard tended to convince him of its truth. A rooted belief in his own common sense and keen insight compelled him to a like conviction. These told him that under such circumstances young men were never guided by purely philanthropic motives. They might for a time think that it was so, might even for a longer or shorter period act as though it were; but in the end their philanthropy would prove fallacious, and less generous and possibly reprehensible emotions supervene.

Fortified by what he had heard, by his keen insight and great common sense, Mr. Grierson entered his private room and bolted himself within. He sat down to his desk and made a copy of the letter received that

morning. Having completed this, he laid down his pen and sighed. He thought, and perhaps for the first time during the day—so engrossed had he been with his employment—of Dorothy; of Dorothy, sad and tearful; of Dorothy, whose love had been given to one so unworthy; of Dorothy, not only deceived, but mateless. And a moisture gathered in his eye.

“Yet, bah!” he exclaimed, brushing a hand across his face. “The sooner it is over, the better it will be for her.”

Then, settling to his work, he indited the following note to Martin:—

“SIR,

“I beg to enclose the copy of a letter which I received this morning, retaining the original for my own purposes. If its contents be true, you have acted like a scoundrel, and I forbid you my house. If they are not, I shall be glad to receive

any explanation which it is in your power to give. In either case, and until you have exonerated yourself from the stain cast upon your character, you will be pleased to hold no further communication with my daughter.

“Yours faithfully,

“RALPH GRIERSON.”

The worthy man next proceeded to take a copy of the above, which, when finished, he folded carefully and placed in the breast-pocket of his coat along with the original letter addressed to himself. Enclosing the two others in an envelope destined for Martin, he unbolted the door, and sounded a bell which stood upon the table.

“Take that at once,” he said, when a clerk appeared, “to the post-office, and drop it into the box yourself. It is most important.”

Then he struggled into his great coat.

His lips were compressed, and his every movement was that of a man perfectly satisfied with what he had done. He strode into the street with his chin a little higher than usual, and with that *nemo me impune lacessit* bearing which is common to so many of his countrymen. Indeed, he felt as the lion, who, when his toe is trodden upon by some pigmy foe, avenges the insult by a single blow of his mighty paw. And so he continued to feel until he arrived at his own front door.

Having divested himself of coat and hat, he proceeded to Dorothy's boudoir, and tapped sharply at the door.

"Come in!" cried a voice.

He went in, and stood before his daughter. She was alone, thinking of Martin, forgetful in her love about the letter which had caused her so slight an uneasiness earlier in the day. But her father's presence brought it back to her recollection.

“Well, papa!” she inquired with a smile.
“Did you see Martin in town?”

“No, Dorothy. But I called upon Mr. Copeland, and find the account given in the letter to be perfectly correct.”

The girl uttered a sharp, distressful little cry.

“And I have written to Mr. Ffrench, forbidding him the house until he chooses to furnish us with an explanation of his, to say the least of it, most extraordinary conduct. But, there!” he continued, taking his letter to Martin from the breast-pocket of his coat; “you can read what I have said.”

Dorothy read, and, as she read, grew pale.

“Oh, papa—dear papa!” she exclaimed, having mastered each cold, relentless sentence. “Surely, you have not sent so cruel, so heartless a letter to *him*!”

So cruel! That was the last epithet

which he should have suspected could attach to his words. He had been so thoroughly satisfied with what he had done ; he had been so convinced of Martin's guilt ; that, like many another who writes in haste and repents at leisure, he had not stooped to weigh the full value of what he had penned.

So heartless ! How could that be ? And yet, standing face to face with Dorothy, he was no longer too confident that he had not been even that.

“ Oh, papa—dear papa ! ” she again exclaimed ; “ you cannot have been so cruel ! ”

Seeing that he made no reply, she dropped, miserable and for the moment heart-broken, into the nearest seat.

He tried to soothe her, but in vain. He attempted to convince her of the justice of what he had done, but could make no impression.

“It is not true,” she murmured. “It is not true. I do not believe it—will never believe it, until with his own lips he confesses to the wrong.”

CHAPTER V.

“YELLOW VAPOURS.”

THAT selfsame evening Martin lounged in his room at the Widow Toler's, unsuspecting, and in fancied security. He was alone, for the Globe-trotter had neither returned nor given any intimation as to when he might be expected. Men of the latter's stamp are imbued with a restless spirit. They no sooner find themselves in snug quarters than they become eager to resume the tramp. A nomad life has rendered them unquiet, impatient of restraint, citizens of the world rather than of one state. They are here to-day, sweltering in the Red Sea to-morrow; one month enjoying

the crisp air of a Canadian winter, the next revelling in the tropical vegetation of Tahiti. True globe-trotters these, and to be found in every corner of the earth, repenting them of a "wish to roam," yet loathing in their "native land to dwell;" to be found on every steamer which ploughs the sea, performing their destined function, conveying the ideas of an old world to the new, returning to the old laden with younger theories, promoting a more healthy circulation between different peoples, and each in his little sphere bettering mankind.

And of this nomad crowd the Globe-trotter most certainly formed one. Not that there existed any reason to suppose that at that very time he was on the road to Timbuctoo, or to some place equally remote; although he might be. He might be; but Martin fancied, from words which his friend had lately dropped, that he was to be found nearer home; that he had gone

to his native glens in search of a purer air than that of Camptown, there to feast upon their crags and precipices, and to trace in their snow-clad hills a faint resemblance to the giant peaks—bristling with glaciers, dazzling in their virgin purity—that he loved so well, and amidst which he had sojourned when living in the Waimate County. And, from time to time, such refreshment was a necessity to one of the Globe-trotter's temperament.

But, be the Globe-trotter where he might, Martin that evening was alone. He had not called at the Hall on his way from town, having lingered there long hours the previous day. And now he sat in an easy-chair, reflecting, not only over things past, but things present and to come. He was to be married early in February—in about two months from then—and afterwards intended to spend with his bride a few happy weeks on the Riviera; possibly to

go so far as Florence, there to dip into its picture-galleries, its churches, and palaces.

That morning, a letter had reached him from his mother, mentioning that Percy and his wife were in London, and hoping that he would spend the coming Christmas at Chudleigh. And that he might do so opened a bright prospect to his fancy. He loved the old place right well. He longed to see his mother; to see Arthur and Blanche in their new home; to picture his so-soon-to-be happiness in theirs. It would be the last Christmas that he could go there as heretofore—as a bachelor, unencumbered by wife, or maid, or basket-boxes. Not that he dreaded the additional burden which such impedimenta would cast about his shoulders—not that, but, like other men in a similar position, he desired to taste one last whiff of liberty before submitting his feet to the connubial shackles.

Yes. It would be pleasant to see the old home once more, and after these long months of separation. All in it that could jar his feelings would be absent; all, that is, except Mrs. Hardyng, and her presence could not greatly disturb his peace. A formal call at the Chase, and his conscience, so far as she was concerned, would be justified. But Mr. Hardyng had ever been his friend, and it would be pleasant to meet him again. Then came visions of Linn, of Juno and Timon, of days among the rabbits in the Sparrow Copse, of pheasants rocketing above the fir trees in the Dingles, of renewed confabs with Master Killick and Master Street, of long runs in which reynard was to prove his stoutness. These formed gay dreams, over-arched by an ever-present recollection of the dark eyes which he had come to love so well.

For the figure of Dorothy mingled with

his every fancy; stood by his side when, from the well-known terrace, he thought to gaze upon the wide champaign below; rode with him through the lanes as he revisited the vine-covered, deep-roofed cottages; gently pressed his hand as he told about that Christmas morn when in the old church he had been so sad. But, thank Heaven, that sadness was past and gone. Henceforth Dorothy would be his stay, his comforter. Henceforth, and on each Christmas morn, they could together listen to the voices of the choir as they sang—

“O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.”

Borne by such dreams, Martin was wafted to distant shores. He forgot about the cares of business, about Minnie and the stiff cross-examination which he had

suffered at the hands of the coterie. Thoughts of Dorothy, of his mother, of Chudleigh, usurped their place ; nor “from his lips did come one word of wail.”

And yet, so unstable is mortal happiness, the Avenger was already on his track, approaching rapidly. The clock had barely gone eight when the maid-of-all-work handed him a letter. He recognized Mr. Grierson’s handwriting, and toyed with the envelope before dipping into its contents. No doubt it was an invitation to dine at the Hall, and possibly for to-morrow—one more pleasure added to the many which seemed just then so eager to accumulate about his path.

He was loth to tear himself from Chudleigh and the thoughts which the old home had stimulated ; loth to tear himself from the fancy that Dorothy had been with him even there, would in good truth be with him soon in whatever direction he

chose to wend. Nor was there any need to hurry. If the letter contained an invitation he could leave an answer next morning, on his way to town; by doing which, perchance he might snatch another peep at Dorothy sooner than he had expected. So Martin sat and dreamed, though neither so really nor so continuously as a while ago. The thread of his ideas had been broken, and that it is always difficult to pick up.

Ah, well! Perhaps he had better open the letter, and ascertain what his almost father-in-law had got to say.

He lazily drew the enclosure from its envelope, and carefully scanned the few lines which crossed its first page. Then his face turned crimson.

“Acted like a scoundrel!” he vociferated. “Forbid the house—hold no further communication with Dorothy until I have exonerated myself—a stain upon my character! Let us see who can have

penned this monstrous falsehood—let us see who has dared to speak about me thus !”

He picked up the second enclosure, which during his excitement had fallen to the ground, and tore it open. He glanced to where the signature should have been, but found none.

“What else could I have expected ?” he cried fiercely. “What other hand than that of a coward, a cur, could have indited such a lie? And to think that the old fool should believe it ; expect me to prove my innocence, forsooth, and forbid me the house until I do. A thousand times, no. I would not so demean myself for ten thousand Dorothies.”

He paced the room angrily, working himself into a greater passion, thinking but of the insult to himself. One less high-principled, less generous, less impetuous and warm-hearted, might have

considered the matter more calmly, might not have felt the stab, and have proceeded to justify his conduct. Another, perhaps, might have done this, but not so Martin. The soul of honour, as Copeland had called him, he resented the slightest imputation on that honour; generous in his estimate of others, he expected to be treated with an equal generosity; warm-hearted towards those amongst whom he lived, a coldness towards himself was doubly felt. Endowed with a high spirit, like all who make their mark in life, he was impetuous, well furnished with many an angle, nor so smoothly polished as to defy the wind. If he did not set himself on a higher pedestal than other folks, he strove to act up to his convictions, and required his friends to give him credit for so doing. He tried to win respect, but that from a sense of duty, and not to minister to his self-complacency. So, Mr. Grierson's letter

stung him to the quick, wounding him in those very points as to which he happened to be most sensitive.

He was too deeply stirred to consider aught save the impeachment of his honour ; and, having worked himself into an intense heat, felt constrained to relieve his indignation by the exercise of his pen. He seized a blotting-book, and began to write eager, impassioned words, containing no sort of apology, but overflowing from a full heart, each one more impetuous than the last.

He defied Mr. Grierson to prove the charge ; taunted him with trusting to a slanderer, an anonymous backbiter who dared not disclose his name ; said that he would leave his cause to a justice which, though it might be slow, was sure—to a society which, if occasionally and for a time mistaken, would sooner or later hold him blameless.

His pen flew rapidly over the paper, and

had covered eight sides before it ceased to fly. His hand was tired, but his mind relieved. He rose from the table and again walked the room, but this time not so impatiently as before. His overcharged indignation had found a vent, and his excitement was subsiding.

Men, constituted as Martin, if impetuous, are not sulky ; if easily roused, are not vindictive. They do not nurse a grievance, as Fleming has been seen to do, nor do they brood over it until all other ideas are merged in that of revenge. The first tempest of their wrath being spent, they cease to be reckless, and are capable of consequential thought.

Thus, when he had taken a few turns about the room, Martin snatched his letter from the table, and studied the words which had fallen from his pen. And what he read by no means pleased him. It was too voluble, too diffuse, too declamatory.

It wanted dignity, and was the production of an angry schoolboy rather than of a man who has attained maturer years. And, having so concluded, he did the wisest thing that he could have done—tore the paper, which contained the first outpourings of his wounded soul, into fragments.

“That will never do,” he thought. “It would be giving the matter a greater importance than it deserves, and betrays a temper childish in its petulance. I must contrive something manlier, shorter, and more to the point.”

And after a little consideration he produced the following :—

“SIR,

“I beg to return your letter of this date, and also the valuable document which it enclosed. I have no desire to retain the one or the other, either in my pocket or in my thoughts. You would

appear to attach an important credit to the words of an anonymous writer, whose motives I am unable to fathom. I shall not so far demean myself as to enter the lists with one in every way so contemptible. Leaving you to draw what conclusion you please from the course which I have determined to adopt,

“ Believe me to be, yours faithfully,

“ MARTIN FFRENCH.”

Having put his signature to the above, Martin read and re-read what he had written; and, feeling satisfied that he could neither add to nor detract from its pithiness, consigned it to an envelope.

He concluded to take his reply to the Hall without delay. He knew that it would be impossible to sit quietly in his chair whilst the letter was on the table and staring him in the face. Moreover, he should sleep better, if sleep he could, from

a knowledge that Mr. Grierson was in possession of his resolution.

It was barely nine o'clock, and the Hall lay within three-quarters of a mile of the Widow Toler's. The night was bright and starlight, whilst the cool air fanned his heated blood. As he walked briskly along, his mind was still in tumult—dreams of what had been mingling with dreams of what was—the one idea most prominent being the delivery of his letter. But, that accomplished, he started on his homeward road soothed by the reflection that he had acted as best became him, and that his reply was at least dignified. And the thought brought with it a modicum of comfort which, if slight, was in his present need most grateful.

For the first time, he considered Dorothy. He wondered whether she was cognizant of her father's act, and of the charge which had been preferred against himself. And

if so, in what light did she regard them? Had she condemned him without a hearing—had her love proved as frail as Mr. Grierson's faith? But no, that could not be. He recalled her generous nature, her trustfulness, her purity. Hers was not a character to be led so readily astray, to be turned by the first adverse breath, to despise where she had so lately esteemed. He felt that she at least still believed in him; and the consciousness that he had done no wrong strengthened the assurance.

Yet it was hard to be so buffeted of Fortune. Doubly hard that the fruition of his love should be endangered a second time. Was he always to be like Orestes, "a man so whipt by the Furies, and driven madly hither and thither," without finding a resting-place for the sole of his foot? Was the bite of this second snake in the grass to prove fatal to his happiness, and dry the fountains of his heart for ever? It

could not be. He would hope even against hope. He would be true to himself, and then possibly might “weep at joy.”

But day followed day, and Mr. Grierson made no move. Martin was tabooed the Hall, and exiled from Dorothy. His life became far different to what it had been—far more sad, and without a comforter. Yet, he was not altogether cast down. He endured this trial better than the first, for he was mindful of Dorothy’s counsel, and strove to forget himself in a care for others. He often visited Minnie at the training institution in which she had been placed, and was soothed by the hope that she at least was finding rest.

Three weeks had elapsed since Martin was submitted to the stiff cross-examination in Ernest’s studio; nor had he been there since. Whilst he could not endure to think that the coterie might stigmatize his protracted absence as being tantamount to a

confession of his guilt, he had so far hesitated to expose himself to a renewal of its banter. But at last he determined to recommence his visits, not merely for the purpose of reassuming his position with regard to the *habitués* of the den, but to obtain information concerning a matter which of late had greatly occupied his attention. He wished to ascertain whether Fleming still frequented it; and, if so, why he returned to the office each day a few minutes later than on the one before.

For some time Martin had not been satisfied with his manager. The attitude of the latter towards himself had occasionally been defiant. He appeared invariably nervous of a morning, and was sometimes turbulent of an afternoon. Once or twice Martin had caught his eye fixed upon himself with a look which was the reverse of friendly—a look which he knew

that he had not deserved, and for which he was at a loss to account. So, he was far from satisfied, and had determined to seek an explanation.

But first, he would ascertain whether Fleming still frequented the studio. If not, and as was likely from his altered manner, he probably whiled away the mid-day hours in some tap-room.

Martin then betook himself to the studio, though not without a certain palpitation of the heart. His engagement to Dorothy was broken off, and all Camptown must have heard the reason; or, if not the exact reason, had probably imagined one to serve its purpose. The event was too recent for society to have forgotten it; nor had anything important since occurred to divide its attention with himself.

As to the coterie, he need not have been under any apprehension. It received him after his long absence with open arms,—

possibly because it accepted him as being at last a true Bohemian ; possibly because it regretted the misfortune which had overtaken him ; or, more probably, because the one part really pitied him, and the other was glad to believe that he was no better than itself.

Martin looked round the circle, but did not find the object of his search.

“Has Fleming been here to-day?” he inquired.

“Not yet,” said Ernest.

“And probably will not come,” added Tom Spencer. “He rarely does now.”

“I should not care if I were never to see his ugly phiz again,” exclaimed Copeland. “He has got the ‘evil eye,’ if any fellow ever had.”

“He’s taken to the brandy-bottle, or I’m greatly mistaken,” muttered Ernest.

From which it would appear that the subject of conversation was no great

favourite. Indeed, the coterie must have had a grave suspicion as to his character, or its members would not have been so outspoken.

"Fellows of his stamp," chimed in George Spencer, "cannot carry corn. Help them to a rise in life, and they attribute it to their own merit, nor say so much as 'thank you.' They'll turn upon the hand that fed them without compunction,—at least, such is my experience."

"And mine," observed his brother.

"You have been too good to the fellow," continued George. "He wants a tighter rein."

"Rein or no rein, I would not trust him," interposed Copeland. "I noticed the way he looked at Ffrench the day we were chaffing him about Minnie. I——" But here the speaker paused. He had blundered upon the very subject which he most wished to avoid.

Martin looked uncomfortable.

“I say, Ernst,” cried George, with a view to changing the conversation; “who was the fair creature whom I met when coming up the stairs?”

“In a plaid shawl and black bonnet?”

“Exactly.”

“That was the Roman matron,” simpered the artist. “Did not you recognize her nose?”

“I’ll be hanged if I did. All I noticed was her exceedingly disreputable appearance.”

“Her face is rather pimply,” confessed Ernest; “but that does not matter. What I want is her nose, her low forehead, and heavy jaw.”

“And which are to be had cheap, from the great abundance of such material in the market.”

“I’m tired of pretty models,” sneered the artist. “One has no sooner taught them

to pose effectively than, basta! they fly, who can tell whither?"

"Well, Ernst!" cried Copeland, laughing. "If she be cheap, she is also safe."

"What do you mean," inquired the other angrily.

"I mean that her pimples are not likely to dislodge the image of Bertha Graham from your too-sensitive breast."

"Mind your own business," growled Ernest.

"Exactly what I am doing," returned Copeland, anxious not only to divert attention from Martin, but to inflict a punishment for the other's sneer about Minnie. "The rules of chivalry are inexorable. They compel the stronger to protect the weaker sex, and admonish each true knight to save fair hearts from the wiles of deceivers like yourself."

"His amatory propensities ought to be restrained," cried Tom Spencer. "He is

no sooner off with the Pigott than on with the Graham."

"Who happens to be the eldest of six," added George; "attractive but dowerless, and therefore to be shielded from his attacks upon her heart."

"All that he can offer in exchange," said Copeland, "being a dirty palette, a battered colour-box, and the yet-uncompleted 'Mother of the Gracchi.'"

"The girl knows how to take care of herself," exclaimed Ernest. "She is no chicken."

"Really," continued Copeland, with assumed gravity, "you are going from bad to worse. Not content with posing as a ravager of hearts, you are now slanderous."

"Go to Jericho," retorted the Bohemian.

"It's useless to throw pearls before swine," said George. "Where there is so great a difference of opinion, there can be no community of sentiment; and I, for one, must be off."

Martin, too, was desirous of returning to his office. He wanted to be there before three, that he might ascertain whether Fleming resumed his duties at the proper hour. If not, he had determined to expostulate—a conclusion as to which he had been greatly strengthened by the opinions concerning his manager so freely expressed by the coterie.

He had barely reached the street, when he found Copeland at his elbow.

"Ffrench!" exclaimed the latter, taking his arm. "You cannot think how sorry I am that your engagement is broken off. I feel as though I had turned a traitor—as though I were the prime cause."

"You!" cried Martin with surprise.

"Yes. Grierson came to my place one day, and pumped me as to what I knew about the charges in that letter. I tried to put him off, but it was of no use. He had made up his mind, and the slightest

corroborative evidence was sufficient to determine him."

Martin did not reply—his heart was beating too violently at the remembrance of what he had lost.

"I did what I could," the other went on, "and flattered myself that all might yet be well; that you would be able to return a satisfactory answer to the charge—a charge which I am certain, old fellow, is groundless."

"It is, Copeland. But, none the less, I am grateful for your good opinion." And he was really grateful. He was glad to have found at least one friend who could understand his conduct.

"And did you not tell him so?"

"Tell him so! No. He likened me to a scoundrel; he forbade me the house; he believed an anonymous slanderer in preference to myself."

"Pardon the question, Ffrench, but what

reply did you send to his letter?—for I conclude that he wrote. I do not inquire out of mere curiosity."

"I returned his letter. Told him that I could not so demean myself as to enter the lists with an anonymous writer, who was in every way so contemptible; and left him to draw his own conclusions."

"Magnificent, but high-flown," remarked Copeland, with a smile. Then, after a pause, "And yet, perhaps, he richly deserved all that you gave."

"I could not stoop to any further explanation."

"And Miss Grierson! How does she bear up against her trouble?"

"I cannot tell."

"It is a most unfortunate affair," murmured Copeland, whose growing tenderness for Eva Poppleton made him thoroughly sympathetic. "Pity, too, that the Globe-trotter was not at home. He

might have put matters in a different light."

"I can hardly think that. He could not have altered the tenor of Mr. Grierson's communication."

"Perhaps not, Ffrench, But he might have unearthed Minnie."

"How do you mean?" exclaimed Martin warmly. "You don't think that I have spirited her away?"

It was on the tip of Copeland's tongue to reply that such almost appeared to be the case; but he refrained. "I mean," he said, "that you might have been induced to tell the Globe-trotter what you did not like to tell those fellows in the studio."

Martin did not respond; whilst Copeland was silent, hoping that his companion would confide then and there to himself. If he would only do that, perhaps it was not too late to effect a reconciliation. But the hope was vain.

"I cannot help thinking," he presently went on, "that Fleming has had a hand in this. None of the others who frequent the den could have done it; no one outside their circle, so far as I know, is aware of Minnie's existence. Then he regarded you vindictively all the time that we were chaffing about the girl."

Martin's confidence in his manager was not yet so shaken as to permit him to think such a thing to be possible.

"Well, Ffrench, I may be wrong. But, whatever you do, watch the fellow closely."

"I will," returned Martin. "I have determined to do so."

"I am glad of that. Well, good-bye, Ffrench!"

"Good-bye, Copeland; and many thanks for your kindly feeling."

CHAPTER VI.

FLEMING OVERSHOOTS THE MARK.

HAPPILY for his purpose, Martin reached the office before three o'clock, and found that Fleming had not returned. He glanced abstractedly at a few unimportant letters which had come by the midday post, and flung them carelessly, each after the other, upon the desk. He was by no means of those who can handle three or more subjects at one and the same moment, and that with apparent facility. His mind, once directed to a given object, became centred thereon to the exclusion of other things. If slow-moving, what intellect he possessed was thorough; if bent upon the accomplishment of a purpose, it could not readily be

deflected. His impetuosity was superficial rather than deeply rooted, and, when excited, was incapable of dominating his conduct for long together. As on the previous evening it had yielded to reflection, so now it was powerless to interfere with the deliberateness of his intention. And yet, its shadow could be felt,—causing him to experience an uncontrollable restlessness; making him anxious to complete the investigation which usurped his thought.

Ten minutes past three, and Fleming had not appeared. Martin ascended the corkscrew stair that led to the office above the one in which he usually worked, and where his manager that morning had been posting the ledger. He seated himself upon the brass rail of the tall fireguard, his back to the grate, his face towards the long, low window opposite. But there was nothing to be seen through the dingy panes which could arrest his attention. Old roofs slated

with ponderous, old-fashioned slabs ; brick chimneys surmounted by dilapidated chimney-pots ; a sunless, murky sky ; — these formed the only landscape.

From the window his eye wandered to the double desk, with its sloping top, now littered with books and with, conspicuous among the rest, a thick red-bound ledger. How well he knew that ledger's every page ! What hours he had spent over its long columns ! How vividly he recalled those earlier days when Fleming had helped him with his task, and played the part of good Samaritan !

Now, his at that time friend had become, at least he feared that it might be so, an enemy. He himself was master of the business, responsible for what was done, the one representative of those many generations which had preceded him. All these had passed away. The cast-off dining-table, the time-worn sideboard, the rush-bottomed

chairs, the piles of letters—docketed and separated into neat bundles—which reposed in the tall cupboards to his left, were the only mementos of their once activity. And yet, many of their number had been hard-headed, pushing men—boroughreeves of an older Camptown, worthy magistrates, good citizens—once notable, but now forgotten.

And Martin, considering the past, wondered whether he could attain a success like theirs, or whether the later times in which he lived did not render the prospect of his doing so impossible; whether steam, electricity, and a greater economy as between nation and nation were not so reducing profits as to make the position of a middle-man, or merchant, like himself, untenable. In any case, was he the one to surmount these undoubted and ever-growing obstacles, and to rise equal to the occasion? He could but try.

Once more he looked at his watch, to find

that it was twenty minutes past three, or, in other words, that twenty minutes had expired since that which ought to have seen Fleming at his desk. Walking to the window, he opened one of the casements, and, peering into the street, sought to descry the truant's figure. But pathway and road were alike deserted, save where a piled-up lurry stood just beneath, discharging grey calicoes at the warehouse door. Neither footfall nor other sound broke the quietude of the lane, except, now and again, that given by the bundled cloth as, pitched from the top of the load, it fell with a dull thud upon the boarded floor.

The murky sky threw back the heat discharged from the vast city. The air was warm, though dead; and Martin remained for several minutes with head and shoulders thrust out of the window. From where he stood, he could overlook the high wall which reared its blank front on the

opposite side of the lane, and could gaze into the courtyard beyond. Once this had been a garden, belonging to one of those bygone worthies who had been wont to feast at the now cast-off table; who, on a summer's afternoon, and after an early dinner, had been accustomed to sip his port or claret beneath the shade of its tall trees; who had there smoked his long church-warden, watching both wife and daughter as they culled its flowers. But now, tall trees and flowers, wife and daughter, church-warden and port-wine, had disappeared, scattered by the hand of Time, resolved into their constituents. Instead, showed a dreary court, asphalted, wall-surrounded, peopled that mild, dank-laden afternoon with a crowd of loungers dingy as itself. Some of these, half-blind, led others wholly so. Some sat on benches with their backs against the wall. Some groped their way, at times stumbling against their fellows,

at times wiping the humour from their streaming eyes. For the house and grounds of Martin's forefathers had become an eye-hospital, and substantial comfort had given place to disease and pain.

Long months had passed since he looked over the wall down into that dreary court. To do so chilled his blood, brought home the curse of sin, excited pity for a suffering which he was powerless to avert, and could but partially alleviate with his purse. So, having gazed a few brief moments, he was more than satisfied; and, withdrawing his head, closed the window.

“After all,” he murmured, “my lot is not as theirs. It is one for which, despite all the sorrow it has brought, I ought to feel deeply grateful. I am not as those poor things—decrepit, blind, suffering, and that perhaps through the fault of others. But, oh, that this world were sinless—oh, that it were still what once it was!”

Nor has Martin been the only one to formulate the same prayer. Many have shrunk with terror from the abyss which yawned on their either side—have mourned over poor humanity until sick at heart. Many, thus terror-struck, have striven to keep pure themselves, and to ignore the vile. But, notwithstanding individual effort, the vile remains vile—a protest against itself, a sad beacon continuously ablaze, a warning to thousands not to precipitate themselves into the bottomless depth which gapes at their feet.

Having closed the window, Martin resumed his former situation on the fire-guard. More than half-past three, and still no Fleming. He became almost as impatient as did the manager himself that time he watched the door giving access to the studio, and when he was ensconced in the dark entry. But as then, so now. Martin's long watch was not to be in vain.

A few minutes later a heavy tread sounded upon the stair, for a moment ceased—as though its owner were undecided as to whether he should enter the offices by the lobby—but soon, continuing, drew nearer. A pass-key was inserted in the lock, the door flew open, and Fleming entered the room.

He was startled to find Martin seated on the fireguard. But not for long. He soon resumed his previous manner, and betook himself to the high stool which fronted the ledger.

Martin did not move, though attentive to the other's every gesture. He noted the flushed cheek and dulled eye; the hand fumbling with the pages, and trembling as it attempted to guide the pen. He noted, and more than he had done before, the decadence of a manhood once vigorous as his own; the deterioration in a nervous force which, so lately, had been able to

withstand the severest test. And he knew that he should be no longer blameless were he to delay an explanation.

Fleming perceived that a crisis was imminent. He saw a determined look settle on Martin's face; and noticed that his hands grasped the rail on which he sat more tenaciously. But, so great was the hallucination under which he laboured, so blinded was he by hate, and so maddened by late excesses, that he had no fear as to the result. He rather gloried to think that the hour had come in which he could display his power, and drag Martin through the dust. He had so falsified the books, and so involved the business, that he believed himself to be indispensable, imagined that at last he could claim a partnership, and extort by threats what had been denied to his lengthened service.

So certain was he of success, that Martin's protracted silence became unendurable.

Had the fellow no spirit—none at all? Would he never begin? And the manager shot an angry glance to where the other sat.

But his anxiety was soon to be relieved.

“Fleming,” said Martin quietly, “you were late in returning to the office to-day. Indeed, you have been late for many days.”

“I shall return when it suits my convenience,” retorted the manager.

He had never been so openly defiant, nor had Martin ever felt more disposed to seize him by the shoulders and eject him from the room.

The one had thrown down the gauntlet, the other knew that it must be taken up.

“Fleming,” continued Martin presently, “perhaps we had better postpone our conversation until to-morrow. You appear scarcely yourself this afternoon.”

“That may be your opinion,” sneered the manager. “But you were never a good judge of character, so far as I could see.”

“Nonsense. Pick up your hat, and be off. You have taken a drop too much, and are not fit for work.”

“I shall go at the usual hour, and not before.”

“Be off, I tell you! Your hand so trembles that you cannot hold a pen, much less post the ledger. Your eyes are bloodshot, and your face is flushed. Be off, or you may drive me to say something that you will not relish.”

Fleming continued doggedly at the desk, his hands fumbling with the books, his lips quivering with suppressed excitement.

“Listen to me,” said Martin sternly. “I do not wish to have a scene, but we shall come to that if you do not attend to what I say. I cannot entrust you with the books in your present state. Put them in the safe, and go home without more ado.”

“I shall not,” growled Fleming.

“You had better,” suggested Martin, willing to give him another chance.

“You think that you can do without me, eh? You fancy that you can keep the books and manage for yourself, I’ll be bound you do.”

“I certainly do entertain some idea of the kind,” returned Martin.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the other derisively. “I thought as much. And yet, what *do* you know? You don’t even know that the profits of the last three years have been fictitious; that the Firm is in difficulties; that you cannot keep your head above water without my assistance. You have never dreamed that such things could be possible, I suppose?”

Martin grew colder, and yet more cold, as Fleming poured forth these taunts with a volubility which it was impossible to check, and actuated by a hate which could no longer be restrained. Were these things

true! Could his manager be the villain that his words would imply! Martin trembled to think that it might be so; whilst, at the same time, the brave spirit planted in his breast pointed to the only path that could be pursued with honour.

“No,” continued Fleming; “you have never dreamed that such a thing could be possible. But it is true, so help me, God! Ruin stares you in the face, unless you apply to me for help; unless you make me a partner, give me half the profits of the business, and put me on the same footing as yourself. And a deuced liberal offer, too,” he continued. “Many a fellow would not have been content with so little.”

“Supposing I were to refuse?” demanded Martin.

“But you won’t—you will not be such a fool. If you did,” he exclaimed, irritated by the thought, “I would publish the in-

solvency of the Firm, and drag your good name through the dirt."

Martin gazed thoughtfully at the floor.

"A fine fellow, you, upon my honour," cried the now almost madman; the volcano in his breast in full eruption, its molten stream leaping all bounds, its lurid flames consuming what little sense had yet survived. "A fine fellow, you, upon my honour! to require two loves in place of one—a wife to dangle before the world, a leman with whom to toy in secret. And see what ruin it has heaped upon your shoulders!"

"Hold!" cried Martin, thoroughly roused. "Leave the room, and at once, before I kick you down the stairs."

"Are you mad?" screamed Fleming.

"Go, I say. Go!"

"I shall not."

But the quondam manager had reckoned without his host. Martin strode to the door

and called for Patrick, that confidential messenger who was always on the *qui vive*.

Then, resuming his place on the fire-guard, he waited the result. The next minute Patrick put his head through the still open door.

“Did you call, sir?” he inquired, looking first at Martin and then at the manager, as uncertain to which of the two he ought to put the question.

“Yes,” said Martin. “Put Mr. Fleming out of the warehouse.”

“I shall not go,” declared the manager, doggedly.

Patrick was undecided.

“Do as I tell you,” continued Martin. “Lead him away—he is unfit for work.”

“Lay a hand upon me, and I’ll knock you down,” growled Fleming.

Patrick held discretion to be the better part of valour; and, instead of doing what he had been ordered, began to remonstrate.

“Mr. Fleming, sir, you had better come—indeed you had. Mr. Ffrench is quite right, sir—quite right.”

“Don’t be a fool, Patrick. Take your orders from me, and not from him.”

“No, but really, sir; I think you had better come. You seem shaken, sir, and your hand is all of a tremble.”

Then happened an extraordinary thing. Fleming burst into tears, and his frame was convulsed by the violence of his sobs. The excitement had proved too great for his shattered nerves; his borrowed strength forsook him on the instant; and he bowed his head upon his arms.

Martin signalled to the messenger to lead him away, and Fleming did not offer the slightest resistance. The strong man had become weak: the drunkard had but one wish—a craving for more stimulant. Ambition, jealousy, hate, were alike forgotten. The bar-parlour of the modest,

old-fashioned inn became the one object in his distance, whither he was eager to be gone, where he could drown care in a delirious ecstasy.

For, of late, the manager's daily round had consisted in a dismal sameness. The bottle had been his one friend, morning, noon, and night. A "nip" before leaving bed, to quiet the dog which had bitten him the night before; a nip to supplement the breakfast which he could scarcely touch; a nip, ere he reached the office, to steady his nerves for work; two or more in the middle of the day, to carry him through the afternoon; so many as he was inclined to take from the hour in which he gained his home until he retired for the night;—this had been his constant practice, and these the means to which he had resorted, if so be he might still remorse.

When Fleming had left, Martin closed the door, and resumed his position on the

fireguard. His hands were shaking almost as much as the manager's had done a while before, but from a different cause. The great effort which, during the past half-hour, had been necessary to restrain his passion; the disclosures which the other had made as to the condition of the business; the taunts to which he had been subjected with regard to Minnie;—these had struck deeply home.

Nor could his prostrate condition be matter for surprise. One buffet had followed the other so rapidly—the latter overlapping the spot which the former had rendered tender—that he could not fail to be unhinged. If Fleming had stated the truth, if the business were involved and the profits on which he had reckoned illusory, his chance of obtaining Dorothy became less—became impossible. As a pauper, he could not deign to woo; and a pauper he might be that selfsame hour.

“ Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy ! ” he murmured. “ What misfortunes our connection has brought to both ! What useless regrets ! what expectations that can never be fulfilled ! For you, too, must suffer. You, too, will sorrow, and in greater measure than myself. At least, if that can be,” he added passionately—“ if that can be, which I almost doubt.”

And Martin, hurried by his love, forgot the bulky ledger which alone could unreach the secret of his future ; forgot Fleming’s hate and Mr. Grierson’s lack of faith ; forgot even his care for Minnie ;—too deeply engrossed to think of these, in presence of a so great trouble.

“ Ah, Fortune ! ” he exclaimed impetuously ; “ thou art but a sorry jade ; now stimulating thy votaries by false hopes, now laughing in thy sleeve at their disappointment. Yet, bah ! Canst thou instruct Providence what to do ? Nay.

For 'With thee, sweet Hope! resides the heavenly light.' "

Martin raised his head proudly. He would cease to revile Fortune. He would do his best; and then—might he conquer.

Still, he could not disguise from himself that a weary length of road stretched out before him; that he could not think of going to Chudleigh for Christmas; that the visit to his mother, to Arthur and Blanche, must be postponed; that his position was different to what it had been; and that it behoved him to recognize that it was so.

And here his early training stood him in good stead. He had not been of those who learn without effort, who commit to memory simply to forget, who succeed only to be careless of success. He had plodded steadily upwards, nor had ever lost a step once gained. Reflection with him had become habitual, and upon this had followed self-reliance. Therefore, if he now suffered,

he found a consolation; if his path appeared dark, he faintly discerned the light towards which it tended.

Relinquishing his seat on the fireguard, he approached the desk and bent over the bulky, dry-looking ledger. Fleming's last, uncertain figures marred the otherwise neat page. As he examined the book more closely, he found that for weeks past the figures had been getting less steady; that even in them could be found a proof, if proof were wanting, of the late manager's gradual decay. Martin shuddered, in spite of himself. This evident retrogression suggested possibilities which were far from pleasant.

He realized that the books must be investigated at once, and that right thoroughly. Fleming had declared his malpractices to have extended over a period of at least three years, and the examination would be both tedious and

prolonged. It would be necessary to call in a professed accountant, and the sooner that was done the better.

Having so determined, he gathered the books together, and deposited them, one by one, in the large safe. He closed the door upon them with a feeling of relief. Whilst on the desk, they whispered uncomfortable things—things which, then and there, it was impossible to certify, and which consequently proved a source of incessant irritation.

When he had locked the safe, he returned to the desk, and took up a pen. First, he wrote to Fleming a formal notice of dismissal, and informed him that his salary to date would be found lying at the offices of Messrs. Garrett and Moorhouse, accountants, through whom all future correspondence must be addressed.

Next, he wrote to Garrett and Moorhouse, requesting them to send a skilled

accountant to make a thorough investigation of the books of Nesbitt, French, and Co.

These letters having been despatched, Martin at last found time to rest his elbow on the desk, and to lay his head upon his palm. He was dazed by the scene which he had just passed through, whilst a jumble of inconsequent ideas shot athwart his brain. He was carried back in thought to Rothbury, to his sufferings there, to Percy's meanness, to that morning when he had appeared in the dining-room with a blackened eye. 'Αει μὲν, ὦ παῖ Λαρτίου, δέδορκά σε, he found himself repeating, not once but fifty times. He strove to drive the hated words back into the obscurity which had enshrouded them for so many and long years. But in vain. They surged triumphantly above all other thoughts,—'Αει μὲν, ὦ παῖ Λαρτίου, δέδορκά σε.

That would never do. He must rouse

himself from the nervous condition into which he had lapsed, else he should go distracted. He would leave the office, and see what a change in his surroundings could effect. He would find Copeland, and invite him to dine at the club.

Fortunately, Copeland happened to be disengaged. He was a bright, cheery fellow, disposed to make the best of life, only given to mope when recollections of the home which he had lost came flocking upon him too strongly to be ignored. But, of late, these recollections had been less frequent; for in Miss Poppleton he had found an antidote—one which had replaced such gloomy moments by pleasanter thoughts. In truth, Copeland fancied that he was progressing in that quarter, and his good spirits were consequently in the ascendant.

“Well,” he inquired, as they were enjoying an after-dinner cigar in the smoking-

room of the club, "how did you get on with Fleming?"

"He came to the office intoxicated, insolent; almost, if not quite, mad."

"And then?"

"I showed him to the door."

"I thought as much," returned the other. "If ever malice and insubordination were stamped upon a face, they are on his."

"But, that is not the worst," continued Martin dejectedly. "He told me that he had falsified the books; declared that his supervision was more necessary than ever; and demanded a partnership as the price of his services."

"Whew!" ejaculated Copeland, emitting a long, thin cloud of blue smoke. "Sits the wind in that quarter. I am not surprised, though. He was blackguard enough for anything."

"Has he embezzled, do you think?" he added presently.

“He can hardly have done that—at least to any extent. Besides, he was in no want of cash.”

“He didn’t bet, or gamble upon the stock-exchange?”

“I think not,” said Martin reflectively. “He was steady enough before taking to the bottle.”

“It’s surprising what a fascination drink has for some people,” ruminated Copeland, “and, in some cases, how speedy its effect. But, after all, you have done a good day’s work, Ffrench, and we must hope for the best. The fellow might have been attempting to frighten you.”

“May you prove a true prophet,” exclaimed Martin, partly reassured by this view of the matter. “In any case, a talk with you has done me a world of good. Your face alone is enough to drive away care.”

But, notwithstanding, as the young man

trudged home that night, hope dwindled, and uncertainty resumed its sway; whilst jangling, jangling, ever jangling in his ear, would come the words—'Αει μὲν, ὦ παῖ Λαρτίον, δέδορκά σε—'Αει μὲν, ὦ παῖ Λαρτίον, δέδορκά σε.

PART VI.

CHAPTER I.

TENE BROSE.

DOROTHY and Mr. Grierson spent the evening of the day on which the latter's note had been despatched to Martin at the Hall, and alone. Both were uncomfortable, feeling that each regarded the subject of that note from a different standpoint, and that neither could convince the other.

Mr. Grierson sat with a paper in his hand and a reading-lamp at his side. But he neither used the lamp nor read the paper. He was indignant against Martin, and angry with Dorothy for not discarding her lover at his dictation. Years had passed since the death of his wife. He had none

to restrain his frequent irritability, or to demonstrate that his slightest wish was not of necessity a law which altereth not. Although loving his daughter, he regarded her as still a child. He did not see that with each succeeding year she had put forth fairer blossoms, until at last these had ripened into perfect fruit. He had forgotten that she was sentient, original, capable of independent thought, but incapable of being altogether modelled upon himself;—forgotten, too, that “the weaning of the bird from the nest is one of the most important objects in life.” So now, when she refused to see things as he saw them, he was both vexed at her and angry with himself.

Nor was Dorothy less disturbed. She comprehended Martin’s high spirit, and dreaded the effect of her father’s communication. She was sorry not to have seen the letter before it went; for in that

case she might have prevailed upon him to soften its harsh tone and evident want of faith. But what had been done was done; and Dorothy plied her needle with anxious forebodings.

It was barely half-past nine when a servant presented a letter to Mr. Grierson.

“Mr. Martin, sir, left it himself, and requested that it might be delivered at once.”

Then it was from *him*. And Dorothy felt the burning flush which mounted to her cheek.

“Pshaw!” exclaimed her father. “It’s no reply at all—none whatever.”

“It must contain an answer of some kind,” suggested Dorothy.

“He returns my letter; declines to say a word in refutation of the charge; and leaves me to draw my own conclusions.”

“Exactly what I expected, papa.”

“It’s insufferable,” continued Mr. Grier-

son pettishly. "He treats the matter as though it were beneath contempt."

"And if he does," cried Dorothy, with flashing eyes, "it is nothing more than he ought to have done. The charge was most cowardly."

"You are prejudiced, my dear."

"So must every one be who knows Martin," she retorted. "And I, for one, will never believe it—never."

Mr. Grierson took off his spectacles and wiped them deliberately. It was a habit into which he had fallen when wishing to appear self-possessed.

"Let us make no farther allusion to the subject," he said pompously, "and agree to differ. All that I expect from you is obedience, and upon that I shall insist. You will be good enough to hold no communication, either verbally or by letter, with Mr. Ffrench until he chooses to be more explicit."

Poor Dorothy. She retired to her room with an aching heart. She knew that Macpherson was absent, and that Martin had none with whom to take counsel. Nor was her own position so very different. Her father, in the present juncture, was hostile. Miss Lander was the kindest, best of friends—but a mentor, not a confidante; with no tie of kindred; clinging to the past rather than articulated to the present. And, now that the girl was separated from Martin—forbidden to communicate with him—she felt weary, sad, and well-nigh desolate.

“Oh, mother—dear mother!” she cried, sinking upon her knees. “You have been taken, but you gave me life,—no other love can be so strong as yours. I love you still, and, oh, so dearly. Watch over your child; cover her with the brightness of your pure soul. For you live, mamma,—you live, and cannot have forgotten your

child, your flesh; who remembers your teaching; who longs to be good, as you are good. Dear mamma, whisper some words of comfort; strengthen, now that there is none on earth to strengthen; help me to be obedient. And, dearest mother, stand by my father's bed, and tell him that your daughter's heart is given to one who has been always true; that she cannot love another, but that she will be obedient. Oh, mother! that I might feel your lips against my cheek; that I might be clasped in your arms, and there find rest."

The young frame quivered with an emotion which, pent up for long hours, had broken forth. This appeal to her mother was scarcely a prayer. It was the act of soul calling to soul; the expression of a want, the consciousness of a life which can never die. It was the outpouring of a girl in need of maternal love; who yearned for consolation, and sought that consola-

tion in a most fondly cherished memory. Dorothy felt that there was still a something which united her life with that of her mother; that neither could perish, but in the times to come must again be brought together. The wind might blow, but could not shake her faith; man might deride, but could not extinguish the hope which, even in the midst of sorrow, spoke of a communion to be renewed.

She knelt by the bed until long past the usual hour. She communed with her heart, and tried to silence its disposition to revolt. She thought of her father, companionless and in the vale of years, with no support but hers. She prayed—and this time it was real prayer—that he might have no reason to suspect her of a less affection, that so far as possible she might fill her mother's place.

But, even when she had attained a more trustful spirit, her troubles were by no

means over. She could not hide her disappointment from the world, nor stay that world's glib tongue. Her name had become common in its mouth, and she must needs hear something, if not all, of that which it was pleased to say. As her engagement had been widely known, so, of necessity, its breach must be matter of equal notoriety.

Mrs. Bolitho was amongst the first to express her sympathy. That good lady seldom missed an opportunity like the present, which gave full scope to her protestations of regard, and to her proclivity for gossip. She delighted to play the good Samaritan, but also delighted to get at what she was wont to call "the rights of a case." She was intensely gushing, but beneath her gush existed an inquisitiveness which was apt to be intrusive. And Dorothy, when her visitor was shown into the drawing-room, happened to be alone.

“My dear child!” exclaimed Mrs. Bolitho, meeting the girl with outstretched arms. “I am so ashamed of myself for not having called before. I have been so anxious—so distressed. Sleep has been a comparative stranger, and Mr. Bolitho has been quite concerned at my want of appetite.”

At last Dorothy could disengage her hands, and offer the good lady a chair.

“Not to-day, my dear,” cried Mrs. Bolitho, shaking her head at the proffered seat. I could not think of such a thing to-day. Let us sit upon the sofa, side by side and *sans cérémonie*.”

Then, leading Dorothy by the hand, she drew her to a couch.

“This is what I call sociable,” she continued, adjusting her skirts and settling her bonnet-strings about her chin; “truly sociable, my dear. I started immediately after lunch in the hope of finding you at

home; and told Eva that I could not possibly bring her this afternoon. She is so young, poor child,—so innocent.”

Dorothy would have preferred Eva’s society to that of her mother, but naturally she hesitated to declare any such preference.

“And now, my dear, tell me all about it. For the world is so malicious—so fond of gossip. It invents such dreadful things when it cannot ascertain the truth. I assure you that I am quite tired of contradicting the many reports which are being circulated with regard to Mr. Ffrench’s conduct.”

“He has done nothing wrong,” interrupted Dorothy warmly;—“nothing of which he need be ashamed.”

“Quite right in you, my love, to stand up for an absent friend. Exactly what I should have expected. But people *do* say that he has formed a most unhappy connection, and that your father is justly

incensed at his behaviour. Understand me, dear; I do not assert it to be so."

"It is untrue," cried the girl tearfully.

"So I should have imagined, love. But ladies are the last people to hear the truth in such cases. Young men are so wild, so inconsiderate, so easily captivated. And, not having been very intimate with Mr. Ffrench, I am unable to feel *quite* so confident as you appear to be."

Dorothy made no reply, trusting that her visitor would comprehend that the subject was painful. But in this she was disappointed.

"I presume, love, that I shall be correct in stating your engagement to be at an end. People ask so many questions, and it is really so embarrassing not to know the exact truth."

"You may say what you please, Mrs. Bolitho; but I must request you not to mention me as your authority."

“I quite understand, love—quite. I can fully estimate the pain which such an avowal must cause to a nature so sensitive. And poor Mr. Ffrench!—his business doing so well, too, I am told. He must feel his position most acutely. Only this morning I was telling Mr. Bolitho that I really pitied him, and should so much like to stand to him *in loco parentis*. ‘But think of Eva,’ he expostulated. ‘I do think of Eva,’ I explained. ‘I am always thinking of the dear child. But Eva,’ I continued, ‘has been well brought up. She will accept Mr. Ffrench as a brother; be to him as a sister; help to lighten the load which he is compelled to bear.’ And really, my love, now that you have assured me that these malicious charges are false, I am more than ever disposed to take the young man by the hand.”

“Will she never go?” sighed Dorothy.

“You cannot think, love, how glad I am

to have seen you. Our conversation has been a great relief, and you may rely upon my placing Mr. French's conduct in its proper light. And yet I am so grieved that this should have happened. Such a *contretemps* is apt to make men the least bit shy. Not that you, dear, have the slightest reason to blame yourself. Your father may have been a trifle hasty; at least Mr. Bolitho, I know, thinks that he has been. Men at his time of life are sometimes a little given that way, especially when deprived of their best counsellor. I often say to my husband, 'I don't know what you would do without me, Bolitho. If I were taken, I don't know what would become of Eva, or how you would manage to make both ends meet.'"

At last she went, and Dorothy uttered a sigh of intense relief; was, in fact, glad that she had come, and that one, perhaps the most trying, of these visits of condolence

could be reckoned amongst the things which had been. But the trials of the day were not over. That evening's post brought with it a letter from Mrs. Claydon-Pigott.

“Dearest Dorothy,” wrote that excellent woman. “I am afflicted beyond measure. To speak metaphorically, I water my couch with tears, and find no rest. How dreadful it all is! How abhorrent to the finer instincts implanted in a mother's breast! At the same time, you have a consolation. You have been betrayed whilst there yet remained a way for escape. Think of that, dearest, and be thankful. Bless a most merciful Providence which has so happily confided you to a father's care. I positively shudder at the contemplation of what might have been—of the years of unavailing regret which might have fallen to your lot.

“Henrietta is inconsolable. Fanny mingles her tears with mine. Dear girls! How grateful it is to my maternal heart

to find that their own happiness does not efface the recollection of another's sorrow. Henrietta insists upon your being one of her bridesmaids—indeed, she would like you to be the only one. But I have exerted my authority, and made her see how impossible it is that her wish can be gratified; that it would be too sad for you to assume just now so public a character. I could not but recollect, dearest, that your own marriage was to have taken place in February—possibly in the very week that my children are to be united to the husbands of their choice. I felt that, were you to act as bridesmaid, the strain might prove too great. And was I not right, Dorothy? Are not my feelings in harmony with your own? It must be so: experience tells me that I have not erred. But the least that you can do is to be present. Your trouble must be forgotten, if only for a day. Henrietta would be *désolée* were you not to be

there. That you will be at hand, in that most trying moment to a young girl, is now her greatest hope—the one idea to which she clings. I plead, dear, as a mother. Let me not plead in vain.”

Dorothy tossed the letter upon the table. She knew Mrs. Claydon-Pigott too well not to estimate her kind expressions at their proper value. She realized the cat-like hypocrisy of its opening sentences, intended to wound rather than to assuage; the hidden venom which lurked beneath its honeyed words; the implied comparison between Henrietta’s almost assured success and her own sad lot.

But Dorothy was proud. She would not exhibit her wounds to eyes like those of Mrs. Claydon-Pigott. None should trample rough-shod upon her aching heart, so long as she retained sufficient strength wherewith to resist their over-willing feet. So, she sat down to her table and indited a note

of thanks, as also of acceptance—one possibly the least bit sarcastic in its tone. Under so great provocation she would not have been woman had it not been that.

Happily, Mrs. Bolitho and Mrs. Claydon-Pigott were not the only ones to offer their condolence. Theodora Poppleton called, bringing in her train a few rays of comfort.

“Frank,” argued Theo, “considers Mr. Ffrench a most honourable man, and to have done nothing for which he ought to be blamed.”

“Frank!” ejaculated Dorothy.

“Mr. Copeland, I mean,” explained Theo, blushing to the tips of her little ears. “He and Mr. Ffrench appear to be great friends, and, I am sure, know more about each other than any one else does.”

“Even than you, Theo?” interrupted Dorothy.

Theo’s complexion turned a yet deeper

crimson, and her reply was not altogether satisfactory. So Dorothy took her hand, and pressed it ; and felt that Theo returned the pressure ; nor was aware how time had sped until tea appeared, and their thick curtains were drawn across the boudoir windows.

“ You will come again, dear,” said Dorothy pleadingly.

“ You will grow tired of me if I come too often,” retorted Theo.

“ Theo ! How can you talk like that ! I have so few friends—none who care for me like you.”

“ Not even Mrs. Bolitho ? ”

“ Don’t be absurd, dear. Come to lunch with me on Thursday, and then we can have a long afternoon together.”

Theodora promised ; and Dorothy was cheered to think that life still contained something to which she could look forward with pleasant anticipation.

Theo’s visits could, perforce, occupy but

a comparatively small fraction of the hours which Dorothy found to drag so heavily. Her father was kind, but did not allude to the subject which chiefly engrossed her thoughts. Miss Lander was sympathetic, but with the sympathy of a fellow-mourner. The rupture of Dorothy's engagement had recalled too vividly the frustration of her own love to permit the display of any great hopefulness; so that the girl could do no more than kiss and thank her, endure as best she might long stories of the past, without confiding her own still lingering dreams anent a happy future.

With no other confidante than Theo, and cast upon her own resources, the girl remembered the advice which months before she had prescribed for Martin. She paid oftener visits to the cottagers of Barton, read to their sick, comforted those who stood in need of comfort, and relieved where she saw that relief was necessary. So that

through all those “sowre-sweet dayes” she did “lament and love.”

Christmas came and went, and it was already the first Wednesday in February—the day preceding that on which Fanny and Henrietta were to be married. Dorothy had been very sad. The near approach of next day’s ceremonial had quickened the sense of her own loss, had centred her thoughts on Martin, and caused her path to seem more lone. If at the wedding she was to show a brave front to Mrs. Claydon-Pigott, it behoved her to cast aside her melancholy. So she determined to visit the poorest, most miserable of the cottages; and to gather from the contrast which they must present to her own surroundings both thankfulness and strength.

Walking down the drive, and intent upon her purpose, she saw a figure entering by the gate at its farther end. It must be, it was, the Globe-trotter,—his face made ruddy

by the rude blasts sweeping from off his native hills; the tan acquired in warmer climes brought once more to the surface; his step light, and his head erect.

Dorothy trembled—so many things had happened since she saw him last. Yet, she was glad that he had returned. Martin would no longer be alone: he would have a friend with whom to talk. Moreover, Dorothy's heart fluttered with an indescribable, newly awakened hope.

“Glad to see you once more, Miss Grierson,” exclaimed the Globe-trotter, pressing her little hand in his great fist until the blood tingled in its every finger. “But you are pale,” he continued, looking into her face more attentively.

“I feel tired,” murmured Dorothy.
“Nothing more than that.”

“Hum!” returned the Globe-trotter doubtfully. “And how is Martin? I havena seen the lad for many a day.”

“ I—I don’t know,” stammered Dorothy.

“ You don’t know ! ” cried the Globe-trotter.

“ No, Mr. Macpherson. He has not been here for weeks ! ”

“ Not been here for weeks ! What in the name of Heaven has the lad been doing ? ”

“ I—I don’t know,” again murmured Dorothy.

The Globe-trotter could not believe his ears. “ Have you two been quarrelling ? ” he inquired.

“ Martin and I. Oh, do not think that ! ”

“ Then what de’il has come atween you ? ”

She did not reply.

“ Come, lassie,” he continued more gently. “ Trust an old friend, an’ make a clean breast o’ it.”

Which was exactly what Dorothy wanted to do, and would have done had she been less nervous.

“ Out with it, lassie,” insisted the Globe-trotter.

“ Papa received a letter which made him angry. And he forbade Martin the house.”

“ An’ who wrote that same lee—for a lee it was ? ”

“ I don’t know. No one knows.”

“ The loon ! ” cried the Globe-trotter, bubbling over with excitement. “ The cowardly loon. An’ ye to listen to his piping, an’ send the poor lad away.”

“ Indeed, I am not to blame,” sobbed Dorothy. “ I am sure that Martin has done nothing wrong.”

The Globe-trotter regarded her compassionately. “ I believe you, lassie,” he exclaimed. “ But who then dreamed such a thing possible ? Who can ha’ listened to a fause loon afore the word of an honest man ? ”

Dorothy was silent.

“ Weel, may be I can tell without

troublin' you. But yoursel'—ye never thought bad of Martin ? ”

“ Never.”

“ An' what did the letter say ? ”

“ It said that—that he loved some one else.”

“ But ye didna believe it ?

“ Mr. Macpherson ! ” cried Dorothy indignantly.

“ I wanted to know, that was a', ” muttered the Globe-trotter. “ Your sex are kittle kine, an' ye might ha' been like the rest o' them. But I'm satisfied, lass—I'm satisfied.”

Despite this expression of confidence, the Globe-trotter walked alongside Dorothy with head far less erect than it had been when first she saw him. He was wondering who this secret foe could be ; thinking that Mr. Grierson had given the lie to his usual cuteness ; blaming himself for having been away so long.

“ Mr. Macpherson,” said Dorothy, “ you will see Martin—soon. Tell him that I have never doubted his word, his truth, his—— ” And, unable to control her feelings, she burst into tears.

The Globe-trotter was moved. He would readily have begun his hard life anew if, by doing so, he could have purged her sorrow and dried her tears.

“ Miss Dorothy,” he said—and the rough man lost his roughness, his voice its harshness, his lips their sternness ; “ I will tell him a’ that he ought to know ; a’ that you ought to say.”

Dorothy felt more hopeful, no longer so lonely as in the morning. A light had risen in the midst of darkness, making the way more plain, and her steps more certain.”

“ Thank you,” she murmured. “ He will be so much happier now that you are here.”

“ An’ ye can gie me no clue ?

“None.”

Again the Globe-trotter pondered. “What for now could the letter ha’ been written, an’ whose toe can the lad ha’ squeezed? But it’s hard to tell wi’ so much ill-nature ‘on the swag.’ Yet keep a stout heart, lassie,—we’ll unearth the villain yet.”

“If you could but do that, Mr. Macpherson!”

Dorothy reached the Barton cottages with a lighter heart than she had carried for many a day. She felt that at length a clear brain was at work, and that a willing heart was enlisted in Martin’s cause.

CHAPTER II.

DELIRIUM.

UPON leaving Dorothy, the Globe-trotter had but one intent ; and that was, to cover the four miles of road which lay between the Hall and Fossett Lane in so short a time as his legs could be induced to perform the task. He deemed it to be most important that he should see Martin without delay, and glean all that could be gleaned with regard to the unfortunate communication which had been addressed to Mr. Grierson. That done, he determined to hunt down the libeller, compel him to swallow his lie, and reinstate his young friend in the good graces of Dorothy's father.

Such was the outline which the Globe-trotter had sketched for the better regulation of his future proceedings. But as the cup of happiness is many a time dashed from expectant lips, so conduct is oftener the result of circumstance than of volition. In his turn, the good man was to be employed during the coming hours about a work far different to any that he had contemplated; whilst success was to be cast into his very teeth, without any dexterity of his own, and whether he would or whether not.

Entering the office in Fosset Lane, he found Martin at his desk. Business was to all appearance slack, for the table was devoid of either books or papers; and the young fellow sat, gazing vacantly at nothing, his head resting upon his palm. He looked worried and spiritless. His eyes no longer sparkled with a happiness that would not be restrained. Instead of hope,

had come despondency; instead of vigour, an almost apathy.

“What’s amiss, lad?” exclaimed Macpherson, assuming the most cheerful tone that he could muster.

“Everything, Globe-trotter.”

“Everything!”

“Yes. Nothing has gone right since you left.”

“Let’s hear about it, man. You’ve been moping too much by yoursel’, an’ need a wee bit help to set ye up again.”

“It’s too late for that,” returned Martin despondently.

“Nae, lad! Whilst there’s life, there’s hope.”

Martin, like Dorothy an hour or so before, felt inspirited by the other’s words.

“In the first place,” he said, “my engagement is at an end. Mr. Grierson has forbidden me the Hall.”

“An’ believed a cowardly loon afore the word of an honest man.”

Martin regarded him with astonishment. "How did you know that?" he exclaimed.

"A little bird whispered it i' my ear, that's a'. And who forged the lee? Can you tell me that, lad?"

The young man hesitated. He had a grave suspicion that Fleming had either written or caused the letter to be written; but, being without absolute proof, was doubtful as to how he should reply.

"Have ye nae idea at all?" insisted the Globe-trotter.

"None. Unless, indeed, Fleming knows something about it."

"An' ye have kept him in the office, an' ne'er taxed him wi' it?"

"He was insolent, and I sent him away. But that is not the worst," continued Martin, once more despondent. "He has played old Harry with the business, almost ruined it, and left me to fight a losing game."

Macpherson started in his chair.

“That’s bad,” he exclaimed; “at least, if it’s true.”

“There is no doubt as to its being true, Globe-trotter. Accountants have been through the books, and I shall not be able to save more than ten thousand or so from the wreck.”

“Ten thousand is none sae bad,” returned the other dryly. “Many folk would be glad o’ that same.”

“It’s enough for me,” explained Martin, “but not enough on which to marry. Even should Mr. Grierson be convinced of his mistake, I am no longer in a position to offer Dorothy a home.”

“Hoot, man!” cried Macpherson impatiently. “Miss Dorothy will ne’er go back upon her word.”

“But I——” retorted Martin. “How can I ask her to share my poverty?”

“If what stands in your road, lad, is the

want of a bit capital, I've no doubt i' life ye've only to say the word. I've mair siller mysel' than I know what to do wi', and ye're welcome to the handling o' that much."

Martin seized his friend's hand, and pressed it cordially. "You are very good," he murmured,—“very good. I shall never forget your kindness. But—it cannot be.”

“Canna be! And why ‘canna’? Nae sic word ought to be found i' the dictionary.”

Martin was about to explain his meaning more fully when his purpose was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Come in!” he cried.

Then Patrick, opening the door just sufficiently for his purpose, and holding on firmly to the handle, thrust his head and shoulders into the office—his feet remaining, as their custom was, in the lobby.

“Please, sir,—a lady wants to see you, Mr. Martin.”

“A lady!” said Martin, startled; visitors of the gentler sex being as uncommon in Fosset Lane as are rivers of water in the sandy desert. “A lady—and to see me!”

“Yes, sir.”

“What does she want, Patrick?”

“She says as she’d rather tell you herself, sir.”

“Is she young, or old?”

Patrick gazed thoughtfully at his feet. “I should consider she were a little of both, sir; and, possibly, a widder.”

Which attempted solution of the question left Martin no wiser than before. He knew several widows; but which could this be?

“Ask her to walk upstairs,” he said, as the best means of settling the difficulty.

“Shall I gang to the upper room?” inquired Macpherson.

“For Heaven’s sake—no, Globe-trotter. Let us both hear what she has got to say.”

Presently a middle-aged, respectably

dressed woman—possibly on the wrong side of forty, but withal sufficiently comely—entered the office. She was agitated, but retained enough self-possession to drop a curtsy, first to the Globe-trotter and then to Martin.

“Pray be seated, madam,” said the latter, pointing to the late Mr. Nesbitt’s well-cushioned chair.

The visitor sunk into it mechanically.

“Which of you gentlemen is Mr. Ffrench?” she demanded.

“I,” replied Martin; “and this is my friend, Mr. Macpherson. But you seem a trifle discomposed, madam. Pray take your time, and do not think of hurrying yourself on our account.”

“And if I am discomposed, gentlemen, it’s because I’ve enough to worrit me. I’m a lone woman as gets a living by taking lodgers; and, at this very time that is, I’ve got a raving lunatic in the house—

a madman, who won't leave the premises for all I can do to make him go. I durstn't sleep to-night in my own bed, gentlemen—I really durstn't."

"A madman!" exclaimed both in the same breath.

"A madman, if there was ne'er another in the kingdom. It's Mr. Fleming, sir," she continued to Martin. "He's gone clean out of his mind with drink."

"But, Mrs.——"

"Mrs. Whitworth, sir, of Cumberland Villas, Prince's Road. That's my name, and where I live, sir; and an outcast I am this very night—I am, for sure."

"But, Mrs. Whitworth, what can *I* do? Cannot you get a doctor to attend the fellow?"

"And what good would that be? A doctor couldn't stop with him all night; and it's not a doctor he wants, it's watching."

Martin recognized the force of her words.

"I've come to you, gentlemen," continued Mrs. Whitworth, "because I knowed as Mr. Fleming has been in this employ for many a year; and, though he may not have behaved quite handsome, I thought, happen-like, you would be pleased to tide a lone woman over such a time as this. Anyways, I durstn't go home by myself. And I won't, that's flat."

The Globe-trotter had been turning the matter over in his mind.

"I'll go with you," he said. "I've seen a few o' these sort o' cases afore."

"But why should you trouble yourself?" exclaimed Martin. "If either must go, I ought to be the one."

"Nay, lad; you couldna do much good, I doubt. An' you might do harm. The sight o' you might make the fellow worse."

"Perhaps so," acquiesced Martin reluctantly.

And thus it happened that the Globe-

trotter started on a jaunt which ten minutes before he had not even contemplated as possible, and to the assistance of one whom he had always disliked.

He walked alongside Mrs. Whitworth, oblivious to her running fire of small-talk, and in deep commune with himself. This visit, he thought, might be productive of great good. He might be able to ascertain whether or not the letter which had done so great mischief emanated from Fleming. In that case he could at least clear Martin's name of the slur which had been cast upon it—for the Globe-trotter could have sworn that slur to be unfounded. To that hour, he knew nothing more than what Dorothy had told him. He had no idea as to whether the letter contained a distorted relation of something which had actually taken place, or was but a pure fiction—founded on a non-existence. Mrs. Whitworth had interrupted the late conversation

before he could put any of those questions with which he had come prepared. But that was of little consequence. Martin, he felt sure, was far too honourable to have done that with which he had been charged.

Arrived at Cumberland Villas, his companion opened the door with a latch-key, and motioned the Globe-trotter to tread softly. Then, having cautiously shot the bolt, and put on the chain, she pointed to Fleming's sitting-room.

"You'll find him there," she whispered. "I durstn't go in myself, not if you was to give me an hundred pound."

The Globe-trotter pulled himself together, and the next moment was alone with Fleming.

The ex-manager was lying back in his chair—perfectly still. To one unacquainted with the disease which held him in its grasp, he might not have appeared so very different to other men. A trifle flushed,

perhaps; a trifle glassy about the eyes; a trifle more nervous than was compatible with perfect health,—and then the unaccustomed one would have passed on his way, satisfied with his perspicuity. But not so the Globe-trotter. He had investigated many odd corners of the earth, and had in his day encountered many a queer bedfellow.

A bottle more than half-full of brandy was upon the table, and beside it stood an empty tumbler. But there was no vessel in the room which, by any stretch of the imagination, could have been thought to contain water.

Slight as had been the noise made by the closing door, it was sufficient to excite Fleming's attention. He threw a restless, yet vacant, glance at the intruder, and leaned forward in his chair. He sat in the same position for at least a minute without speaking, and as though endeavouring to recall the other's personality.

“Ha, ha, ha! Is it you, Nesbitt?” he cried at last. “I’m glad to see you. I thought you’d come back to make other arrangements about that money you left to those darned societies. Shake hands, man,—shake hands.”

The Globe-trotter walked round the table, and took the other’s moist, warm hand.

“Sit down,” continued Fleming, pointing to a chair on the other side of the fire. “Sit down, and make yourself at home.”

Then, having more than half-filled with raw spirit the tumbler which stood at his elbow, he pushed the bottle to his companion.

“Take a drop,” he said. “You must want it after so long a journey.”

The Globe-trotter procured a second tumbler from the sideboard, and poured into it a small quantity of brandy. Then, he replaced the bottle on the table, but somewhat to the rear of his left elbow,

so that Fleming could not reach it without either going round the room or stretching across his body.

“ Ah ! ” continued the ex-manager. “ You’ve come in the nick of time. I’ve not yet paid a cent of the money away—wasn’t such a fool. We shall want it for the business, when we’ve turned that skunk out of the office.”

“ I suppose we shall,” assented the Globe-trotter.

“ I’ve played our cards well whilst you have been away, Nesbitt. I’ve more than half-ruined the——” And he broke off suddenly, casting a terrified glance over his left shoulder.

“ Look, Nesbitt,—look ! It’s on my back—that big, white rat. Take it off, man, for God’s sake ! ”

The Globe-trotter rose from his chair, and pretended to seize something in his hand.

“Throw it out of the window,” cried the madman.

The other raised the sash, and cast his white handkerchief into the darkness.

“There,” he exclaimed cheerily. “We can say good-bye to that fellow for to-night. He can’t come in again.”

Fleming, apparently satisfied, drained his tumbler to the last drop.

“Tell me how you served out Ffrench,” said the Globe-trotter, attempting to draw the other into a confession.

“That’s my secret,” retorted Fleming, with a cunning leer. “And the ‘how’ doesn’t matter to you, so long as it’s done.”

“Certainly not,” replied the Globe-trotter soothingly. “But you are a clever fellow, and I thought that you might teach me a wrinkle.”

“So you think I’m pretty clever, eh, Nesbitt? Pass the bottle, man, and let’s drink your health.”

“Business first,” returned the Globe-trotter quietly. “I suppose, now that I’ve come back, lad, you’ll be wanting a partnership?”

“You never said a truer word, old fellow;—I’ve earned it.”

“Ffrench would not give you one, eh?”

“He turned me out of the office instead. But, ha, ha, ha! I was even with him. I split upon him to Grierson. I got him kicked out of the Hall. I let on about Minnie. I—— Hark, hark!” he exclaimed suddenly. “Listen! It’s a baby! It’s being murdered—smothered.”

“Nonsense, man; there’s no baby about the place that I ken of.”

“It’s here—in my chair,” shrieked the other. “Take it away,” he cried, bursting into tears. “I shall sit upon it—kill it. Take it away, in Heaven’s name.”

The Globe-trotter came to his side, and,

stooping down, appeared to lift something in his arms.

“Be gentle with it—be kind to it, Nesbitt. Have you got it quite safe?”

“Quite.”

“Ring the bell, man, and give it to the old woman. We don’t want babies in this room. Who the devil could have placed it in the chair?”

When Mrs. Whitworth appeared, the Globe-trotter met her at the door.

“Take this baby, ma’am,” he said, “and put it to bed.”

“Baby, sir!” exclaimed the astonished woman.

The Globe-trotter regarded her significantly. “Yes, ma’am,—baby. Do as I tell you, and that without more delay.”

She took the hint, and retired with her precious charge.

Fleming remained all this time with his hands to his face, and sobbing loudly.

“Brandy,” he exclaimed, as Mrs Whitworth left the room. “More brandy, Nesbitt. I’m dying for another drop.”

The Globe-trotter, seeing that further stimulant was necessary, poured a little into the other’s tumbler.

“More—more, Nesbitt!”

“Not until we have done with business, lad.”

“Business be hanged!” muttered the ex-manager, swallowing the portion which had been given at one draught. “Let us go and find Minnie.”

“Minnie!” exclaimed the Globe-trotter, thrown off his guard.

“Aye, you fool,—Minnie. I must find her. That skunk has taken her away—secreted her from me. Let’s go and pack a portmanteau, and then we’ll try to find her.” Saying which he made for the door, and began to ascend the stairs.

“Bring the brandy along,” he shouted, when halfway up the first flight.

The Globe-trotter felt that he was in luck. He had been scheming how he could entice the fellow up to bed, and now he was going thither of his own accord. So, laying hands upon the bottle, he followed in the other's wake.

Fleming had already snatched a small portmanteau from the shelf on which it stood, and was fumbling with its straps. Then, he went to a chest of drawers, and flung down article after article until a large pile of clothes had accumulated at his feet—one far too bulky for the portmanteau.

“Have you found all that you want, lad?” demanded the Globe-trotter, seeing that the other had desisted from his task.

“What’s that to you?” growled Fleming suspiciously.

“Nothing—nothing at all; except that I thought you might lie down a bit whilst I stowed away the things.”

“And, when I’m asleep, you would find

the girl on your own account ! *You* can't catch a weasel asleep, Nesbitt."

"You're a clever lad, Fleming,—very clever."

"Glad you think so," he sneered.

The Globe-trotter eyed the speaker attentively. These last words had been spoken drowsily, whilst the young fellow's body was gently swaying to and fro. The change from the heated room below to the colder atmosphere above was beginning to tell.

"Nay," said Macpherson, "I won't play you false. Get on to the bed, lad, and I'll get thee a drop more brandy."

The bait was irresistible. Fleming tottered to the bed, and flung himself, dressed as he was, upon the coverlet.

"The brandy, Nesbitt,—the brandy," he muttered.

The Globe-trotter gave him a moderate dose of his so dear poison ; and then, the better to dissemble, began to put some of

the clothes which strewed the floor into the portmanteau. He had scarcely commenced to do this when a deep breathing, coming from the bed, proved that Fleming had sunk into a heavy sleep. The Globe-trotter rose from his knees and wiped his brow. For a time he stood without motion, listening to the stertorous respiration of his companion. Then he fell into a chair with a sigh of intense relief.

He knew that the sleep would be both deep and long, and that he should have ample space in which to determine his future plans. At the same time, it behoved him to be wakeful.

He endeavoured to recall the conversation which had taken place in the room below, especially that portion of it which referred to Martin. Fleming's confession had been fragmentary, not all that he could have wished, but yet sufficient for his purpose. The ex-manager had declared

that he wrote the letter which had caused so much trouble. He had alluded to Minnie as the object of Martin's surreptitious love. He as good as admitted jealousy to be the spur which had excited his malice. And, putting this and that together, the Globe-trotter imagined to see his way more plainly.

Then his thoughts reverted to bygone times. He remembered to have seen men, when other means of self-destruction failed, attempt to dash out their brains against the nearest wall; to have seen them jump down cliffs; leap from the taffrail into the seething waters; drink, in their madness, the coarse spirit in which reptiles had been conserved; point shudderingly in their last hour to the fancied demons who stood waiting to receive their departing souls. And, reflecting upon these things, the Globe-trotter assured himself that he had got well through his present difficulty.

He moved softly to the bed, and threw a rug over the unconscious form.

“An’ that thing calls itself the noblest work o’ nature,” he murmured. “Says that it requires nae staff on which to lean; would make itself independent of its Creator. Aye, an’ there’s many like yon puir lad, who mistake their ain will for liberty, who fancy to drive when they are but driven.

“Eh, man! it’s awfu’ to think o’ that worshipping o’ self; o’ that ‘Greatest Happiness Principle’ which leads on to nothingness, an’ takes no heed o’ duty, honesty, or what is and must be. Ah, weel! They that hold sic views are puir bodies that canna alter one jot or tittle o’ the written law.

“But it’s sad for a’ that. An’ it’s sad to see yon lad a-lying sae low, with nae staff that he kens o’ to keep him frae falling lower. Aye, they may try, an’ try, an’ try, but there’s nae power given on

earth to save a man when he's once taken to the bottle. Pledges won't do it; a wee bit ribbon won't do it. I've seen enough o' them feckless things. There's but one cure that I ken—an' that's a Love greater than man has it in his hand to gie."

The Globe-trotter bowed his head; and, when a few moments later it was again raised, a tear-drop stood in each of the old, weather-beaten eyes.

"This will ne'er do," he muttered; for, like many who for years have led a solitary life, he had contracted a habit of uttering his thoughts aloud, and at such times reverted more than ever to his peculiar, mixed-up dialect. "I must be up an' stirring. There's nae brandy in the bottle, an' the lad maybe will want a drop when he comes round. I doubt, too, that I should be a' the better mysel' for a wee drappie. It's cold work sitting with a man like yon the night through."

After a while, he looked at his watch and found that it was five o'clock. He had no idea that the hours could have sped so rapidly. It must have been later than he fancied when Fleming came upstairs. His reflections anent the conversation which had taken place below; his schemes for Martin's welfare; the bygone incidents through which he had relived; must have engrossed him for longer than he could have thought possible. But he did not therefore grumble. None knew better than himself how weary the night-watches can sometimes be.

He determined to rouse Mrs. Whitworth—that is, if fear had not prevented the good dame from closing her eyes, and she were not already astir. But no. She was fast asleep, for he had to tap repeatedly at her door before he could secure attention.

“Who's there?” she cried, after a while—jumping, as appeared from the sounds

which came from within, from her bed in great alarm.

“Don’t be frightened, ma’am,” whispered the Globe-trotter through the key-hole. “It’s I—Macpherson.”

“Lord, Mr. Macpherson, you gived me quite a turn. I thought as Mr. Fleming must ha’ broken loose.”

“I’m sorry to disturb you, ma’am,” returned the Globe-trotter penitently; “but the brandy is done, an’ I must have a drop more again the lad wakens.”

“There’s a bottle, sir, in the cellaret downstairs.”

“An’ maybe,” queried the Globe-trotter, “the cellaret is locked?”

“Mercy on us—so it is. And I’ve got the key in the right-hand drawer of my dressing-table.”

“Perhaps you will be good enough to hand it to me, ma’am.”

The lady was clearly embarrassed, for she

vouchsafed no reply to this so reasonable demand.

“Perhaps you will be good enough to hand it to me, ma’am,” repeated the Globe-trotter.

“I—I’m hardly in a fit state to open the door,” murmured the widow coquettishly.

“Then pass it under the door, ma’am.”

Which Mrs. Whitworth accordingly did.

“Thank you,” said the Globe-trotter politely. “And now,” he continued, again through the key-hole, “I am afraid that I must trouble you still further. The lad is asleep, but will waken presently. When he does, he ought to have a doctor. Will you be good enough to call one?”

“It’s so dark, and will be so lonesome in the street,” objected the lady faintly.

“May be you’re right, ma’am,” returned the Globe-trotter dryly. “Weel! slip on your claes and come watch the lad. I’ll gang for the doctor mysel’.”

The widow, apparently considering the second proposition to be worse than the first, hauled down her flag.

“Nay, sir,” she cried hurriedly, “I’ll go—I’ll go, and you’d best return to the poor young man.”

Now, although Mrs. Whitworth, after ringing several times and vigorously at the night-bell, caused the doctor to put his head out of the window long before six o’clock, the gentleman himself did not reach the Cumberland Villas until the sun was brightly shining in a clear, frosty sky. Perhaps he had felt how keen the air, perhaps he preferred a comfortable breakfast before commencing his daily round,—in any case it was after nine when he entered Fleming’s room. But as, when he did come, the latter was still sleeping, his tardy advent was of no great consequence except in so far as it served to stimulate Mrs. Whitworth’s bile.

“You’ve come at last, sir,” she tartly observed, when opening the door. “For my part, I don’t see as night-bells are no manner of use, if they’re not to be attended to afore the sun’s high above the chimney-pots.”

CHAPTER III.

DEUX MARIÉES.

For several weeks the house in York Place had exhibited a scene of great confusion, so much so as to cause Mr. Claydon-Pigott to breakfast, dine, and do everything but sleep, at his club. The drawing-room furniture was piled with articles which cannot be more safely described than by the generic term of "underclothing." The morning-room overflowed with wedding presents. The dining-room was the only place where visitors could be received, and that not without excuses, or the hurried putting on one side of mysterious occupations. For in the dining-room had been

located the cutting-out department, with Henrietta in command—she being not only a skilled workwoman but tasteful designer, who could make her own dresses, trim her own bonnets, and that so deftly as to excite the admiration, nay, possibly the envy, of that portion of her sex which was endowed with less dexterity.

But not so Fanny. On an emergency like the present the latter was practically useless. She cut her stuff the wrong way ; her material proved a yard or two short of the quantity which she required. She spoiled, she despaired, she wept,—until Henrietta gave up as useless the attempt to teach her better ways, and found it more economical, in time and temper, to do the work of both. By which one-sided division of labour Fanny's tears were dried and her despair was stayed. Moreover, she lighted upon a position which suited her to a nicety, and became the go-between,—now

running upstairs to the two needlewomen whose services had been engaged, her arms laden with spoils from the cutting-out department; now dancing back into the dining-room to exhibit some already-completed garment, and to dilate upon its perfections. Then she would find leisure to peep into the morning-room, there to feast upon her new Lares which were accumulating with each recurrent day.

Both Bilhah and Zilpah were run off their legs. The door-bell never ceased to ring; letters had to be taken to every post; and beer to be procured wherewith to stimulate the failing powers of the needlewomen at work upstairs. The additional excitement was at first acceptable, then grew monotonous; until at last Bilhah, no less than Zilpah, eagerly looked forward to the Thursday which was to put a period to their toil.

And amid the hurly-burly Mrs. Claydon-Pigott moved calm and stately.

“There was a brightening paleness in (her) face
Such as Diana, rising o’er the rocks,
Showered on the lonely Latmian : on (her) brow
Sorrow there was, but sorrow not severe.”

Sorrow there was—but not severe. Whilst losing her children, she was not bereft of comfort. She was even grateful ; and to prove her gratitude had, since this double engagement, attended church more regularly. Yet her faith was by no means perfected, nor could she so soon discard a belief in the efficacy of works. Faith she reserved for the Sabbath ; her belief in works still regulated her conduct during the other six days of the week, and that none the less now that she was on the point of securing a happy settlement for two out of her three children.

Faith, she argued, might be a good thing in the abstract ; but, that admitted, works

could not be other than its most useful auxiliary. And so Mrs. Claydon-Pigott determined to work. Not that she assisted Henrietta at the cutting-out table, or relieved Fanny of one of the many loads which she carried to the needlewomen upstairs. On the contrary, she kept the girls to their several tasks, and laid fresh burdens upon their young shoulders. She watched their going out and coming in, and was for ever calling them to her side, like an experienced hen which chucks the live-long day to its brood of little ones.

Nor did she so work without a purpose. She knew that such things had been as lovers' quarrels, disappointed hopes, and broken vows. And if "had been," why not "might be."

So Mrs. Claydon-Pigott watched her girls jealously, and kept both Kidwelly Thompson and George Spencer as much as possible outside her door. It was but

logical to assume that the seldomer they met, the fewer would be the occasions on which either pair of lovers could fall out ; that the more they were kept apart, the more they would sigh for Thursday to arrive.

When Kidwelly grumbled, Fanny would call him a "greedy thing," take him to the morning-room, and dilate upon the abundant treasures which were to adorn his vicarage.

When George expostulated, Henrietta would regard him tenderly ; and, with pretty blushes, expatiate upon his penance being only for a season, upon her mother's natural desire to see both Fanny and herself as much as possible before they left the paternal roof for ever ; dwell, too, upon the time, now almost instant, when she would be his own.

Not that Mrs. Claydon-Pigott cared one "drappie"—as the Globe-trotter might, and most probably would, have expressed

it—for the harrowed feelings of her so-soon-to-be sons-in-law. She regarded society at large as a body to be operated upon—utilized when convenient, disregarded when inconvenient. She could have said with Chamfort, “We have three categories of friends—those who are indifferent to us, those whom we dislike, and those whom we hate;” whilst there existed but one Force before which she felt constrained to bend the knee. This was none other than “the primal Necessity of Things and highest God” whom the world recognizes—the Force of public opinion; that grand, original harlequin, habited in many spangles which scintillate now this way now that, disappearing suddenly through unexpected trapdoors, reappearing no less suddenly to exert a never-failing influence. Of this elusive, peripatetic *ignis fatuus* Mrs. Claydon-Pigott was an ardent disciple. She would rise early, and work late, if so be

she could attract a portion of its glamour. It had become to her as the staff of life—her fetish, her caaba.

Although doting upon it as she did, she felt that it required to be humoured, and that she must be careful not to awake its wrath. If such were to happen, she might find herself ingulfed by a troubled sea. It was easy enough to exclude her future sons-in-law from the presence of their Nereids, but, if her action were not to be misconstrued, she must explain her motives.

“I am sure, dear Mrs. Bolitho,” she murmured, on a certain afternoon, “that you will understand my feelings. You are yourself a mother. You can realize the dread with which I regard the hour of separation. Dear Eva must have taught you how hard will be the severance.”

“Indeed, yes,” purred Mrs. Bolitho.

“But to lose two Evas, dear, in one day. To be harassed at one and the same time

by two fears, by two responsibilities. To hope that all is for the best, and yet to mistrust. To be jealous of a love now granted to others, but which was once all mine ;—ah ! that is in truth to suffer.”

Mrs. Bolitho pressed her hand sympathetically.

“You must be brave,” she exclaimed with her usual gush. “You must think of their happiness, and not of your own.”

“I will try, dear.”

“Think, too, of Esther. She, at least, will still be yours.”

“Esther is a mere child,—so impetuous, so full of spirit, so heedless.”

“And you will have Mr. Claydon-Pigott.”

“Yes—no doubt—I shall have Mr. Claydon-Pigott. But men are so selfish, so utterly unable to comprehend the more delicate fibres of a woman’s nature. Do what I will, I shall often envy you the sole possession of Eva—I shall often pray

that it may be long before any one steals her heart and racks your breast as mine is racked to-day."

Inwardly, Mrs. Bolitho failed to endorse any such prayer; outwardly, she accepted it *con amore*.

"Dear child!" she murmured. "She is too young, too innocent, to dream of love."

Having exhibited her maternal solicitude to Mrs. Bolitho, Mrs. Claydon-Pigott devoted her attention to Mrs. Spencer.

It happened that Mrs. Spencer and herself were by no means firm allies. Their characters were too antipathic to induce a unity of sentiment. That of the former was generous, warm, straightforward, incapable of dissimulation; that of the latter, self-centred, cold, tortuous, given to simulation. The one was trustful; the other distrustful. The one considered life in its better aspects; the other in its worse—thus

causing any real harmony between the two to be impossible.

And, just now, Mrs. Spencer felt more than usually bitter against Mrs. Claydon-Pigott. Of late, she had seen Henrietta but seldom. She missed the girl's little attentions and daily visits; missed her presence at the afternoon tea-table, and the opportunities which she had once enjoyed of experiencing a reflected happiness from that of her elder son. So it came about that, when Mrs. Claydon-Pigott called, Mrs. Spencer was anything but graciously inclined.

"And you've not brought Henrietta," she exclaimed querulously.

"She is so intensely busy," apologized the other. "Our time is so short, and so much remains to be done."

"George can't get a sight of her no more than me. It makes him restless, and I shouldn't wonder if he found but little sleep

o' nights. The girl's a'most as good as dead and buried."

"Ah, Mrs. Spencer! You must make allowance for a mother's anxiety. Think how soon I shall lose the dear child, and—for ever."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried the good soul. "She isn't a-goin' to foreign parts; an' if she was, I don't know as it ud make any difference. The young things love each other, an' why not let 'em be together."

"Possibly I have been too selfish," sighed Mrs. Claydon-Pigott.

"Belike you have," retorted the old lady. "But that's soon mended. Let the child come as she did afore, an' leave the sewing to them as are paid to stitch. When George's father was a-courtin, he'd walk in at door as bold as anything; and, a-chuckin' me under the chin, or maybe givin' me a buss, he'd cry, 'Well, lass, ar't ready for a walk?' An' I'd on with my bonnet,

an' away we'd go. We weren't the worst-favoured couple as wandered about the lanes, neither."

Mrs. Claydon-Pigott came to the conclusion that she had gone too far, and that it would be well to temporize.

"Henrietta shall spend a long afternoon with you to-morrow," she murmured. "I feel that my mother's heart may have been a thought too selfish."

"Selfishness ain't of no manner o' use except to make folk miserable. Leave the girl alone; and, I warrant me, she'll soon find her way to the Cedars."

So Mrs. Claydon-Pigott relented, although determining that Henrietta's visits should mostly occur when George was engaged at the office.

But Time—"edax rerum" as called by Ovid; "that bald sexton" as christened by Shakespeare—soon made up its mind to engulf both Mrs. Claydon-Pigott's diplomacy

and Mrs. Spencer's grievances. Thursday dawned—dawned as it had done more than three hundred thousand times before—unnoted by the many, long to be remembered by the few. And on this particular Thursday the household in York Place were to be counted among the few.

The laggard sun had barely shot its first beams through their window, when Bilhah and Zilpah were astir, had donned their spotted muslin frocks, and securely fastened their neat caps. They, bustling about the house, now here, now there, and, sympathetic as on like occasions none but women can be sympathetic, soon roused the others.

Next appeared Mr. Claydon-Pigott, for that day debarred his club, feeling useless and out of place, barking his shins against unexpected boxes placed in dark corners, wishing himself anywhere but in his own house, scarce able to find a vacant chair, unable—owing to the excitement which

possessed him—to utilize it when it had been found.

Following Mr. Claydon-Pigott came Mrs. Claydon-Pigott, gorgeous in mauve satin and white lace, now hurrying Bilhah, now hastening after Zilpah, now flying from her daughters' room, now returning thither to impart some forgotten and fond instruction.

The only person who did not secure at least a portion of her attention was Mr. Claydon-Pigott. Him she left free to sit or stand, as best it pleased him. Presently he would be called upon to pay certain bills, but that morning she esteemed him to be a cipher, a necessary accident; one whose sole function for the day would happen later, and not until he was required to give away the brides.

Early though it was, Fanny had sought relief in tears, and Henrietta alone preserved a trace of self-possession. But even this she found it difficult to maintain. The

bedroom, which she shared with Fanny, had become the centre of confusion—a focus of attraction to every woman in the house.

First Bilhah brought her young ladies a cup of tea.

Then came Zilpah with buttered toast and thin slices of bread-and-butter.

After her the cook, with a couple of eggs which “she’d boiled a-purpose.”

“I thought, Miss Fanny,” explained the latter, “as you’d be the better for summut strengthening. Poor dear. I knows exactly how you feel—I’ve been through it myself afore now.”

Fanny protested that to eat an egg would be impossible.

“Try, dear,” insisted the cook.

“Do try, Miss Fanny,” chimed in Bilhah and Zilpah.

The girl managed to swallow half an egg, but could do no more.

"Look at Miss Henrietta, love," said cook. "She has taken hers quite nicely."

"But I'm not Henrietta," sobbed Fanny.

"Think o' Mr. Thompson, deary. Thinkin' o' Macbean was all as kep me up the day I were married."

"Do, Miss Fanny. Think o' Mr. Thompson," echoed the handmaids.

Then came a tap at the door, and in walked Mrs. Claydon-Pigott.

"Not finished breakfast!" she exclaimed. "You'll never be ready. Off with you, cook. And you, Bilhah, help Zilpah to carry down the young ladies' boxes. The cart will be here in a few minutes to take them to the Cedars."

"In tears, Fanny!" continued the good mother, when the servants had departed. "Dry them at once, and bathe your face with cold water. You won't be fit to be seen, child."

"I can't help it, mamma,—indeed I can't

help it," moaned Fanny, with eyes fresh filling.

"Nonsense; do as I tell you. Then finish your hair, and let Henrietta put on your wreath. You might be going to a funeral."

"I wish that I was," cried the girl.

"You had better leave us," remarked Henrietta; "at least, if we are to be dressed in time. I can manage her better alone."

Her mother having retired, Henrietta locked the door. The servants had been passing in and out the room all morning, and her last visit possibly fulfilled the round dozen of Mrs. Claydon-Pigott's interruptions. And with each visit of condolence or exhortation, Fanny had grown more hysterical. Time was flitting, and Henrietta determined to take her seriously in hand.

Having mixed a fairly strong dose of sal volatile and water, she offered it to Fanny.

“ I couldn’t touch it,” protested the girl.

“ Do as I tell you, and at once.”

Her firmness prevailed over the other’s nervous excitement.

“ Do you think, dear,” queried Fanny, when she had swallowed about half the mixture—“ do you think that he really loves me ? ”

“ Kidwelly ? Of course he does.”

“ He may, now. But suppose he were to become tired of me, and be unkind, or care for some one else.”

“ How can you be such a goose ? ” cried Henrietta angrily.

“ Don’t be cross, dear. But it would be so terrible. I’m so frightened ; and, oh ! I do so wish that I was not going to be married to-day.”

At which prospect the blue eyes again filled to overflowing.

“ I had no idea that it would be so dreadful,” she sobbed.

Henrietta shook her impatiently. "Finish the sal volatile," she cried, "and bathe your face. Then I will arrange your hair, for you will never be able to do it yourself."

"Don't trouble about me," sighed Fanny. "Ring for Bilhah."

"Bilhah would make you worse."

Perhaps the sal volatile quieted her nerves; perhaps the reflection of her head in the mirror, when submitted to Henrietta's deft fingers, gave her more confidence,—in either case Fanny began to regard life more cheerfully.

"So you think, dear, that he really cares for me?"

"I am sure of it, you little goose."

"Oh, Henrietta!" she exclaimed, examining her sister's handiwork more attentively. "How nice you have made it look! Bilhah could not have done it half so well."

Then Henrietta assisted her to don the

pearl-white satin dress which had come from Madame Schlegel, and come without any resistance on the part of Mrs. Claydon-Pigott; fixed the orange blossoms in her hair, and attached the veil; whilst Fanny blushed, and wondered what Kidwelly would have thought had he seen her then. And so she continued to blush and wonder, until Bilhah appeared to perform the same kind offices for Henrietta.

“La! Miss Fanny,” cried the girl. “You do look ’eavenly. I shouldn’t have knowed you—I shouldn’t.”

“Now that you have sufficiently admired her,” interrupted Henrietta, “bolt the door. She must not be seen until you have made me look equally angelic.”

What with the praises of Bilhah and Zilpah, the raptures of cook, and the repeated kisses of her father, Fanny retained the bloom upon her cheek and the sparkle in her eye when she stood before the altar.

The men called her pretty; the ladies deemed her interesting. Kidwelly thought that he had never seen anything so lovely; and, he being the principal party concerned, nothing could have been more fortunate. Yet, if love had not made him blind, he might have noticed that Henrietta was the real centre of attraction. Her dark eyes, half-covered by their long lashes, flashed through the gauzy veil; her brow was white as the purest alabaster; her cheeks were tinted with excitement. To all appearance, she was self-possessed; her movements were graceful; her trim figure showed to the best advantage. And, whilst the men esteemed George a lucky dog, the ladies could find no word in her dispraise.

Mrs. Bolitho alone whispered to Miss Lander—

“A trifle too *prononcée*, don’t you think?”

But, when Miss Lander shook her head,

even Mrs. Bolitho made no further attempt at disparagement.

As Mr. Claydon-Pigott gave away the brides he felt a proud man. He was no longer the useless, unheeded mortal who, earlier in the day, had cumbered the staircase and been elbowed by his own domestics. He gazed fondly at his daughters; and wondered whether, now that they were settled, Mrs. Claydon-Pigott would make his home the least bit pleasanter. He hoped so; but, from the manner of his sigh, such hope was far from being assurance.

Mr. Spencer, too, was a proud man. Breakfast was to take place at the Cedars, and again his rooms would be filled with the *élite* of Camptown. All that money could do to insure success had been done. Yet, even Mr. Spencer had found that money was not of universal power; that it could fill his rooms, but not secure respect, or that "one of us" fraternal state

of mind, to obtain which he would willingly have signed a cheque of at least four figures. That day, however, would do what his money-bags could not. It would provide him with a daughter—charming, sufficiently well-born, elegant—who thenceforth would make his drawing-room an acknowledged centre, and attract where both he and Mrs. Spencer had failed. So, for his own reasons, Mr. Spencer was as proud as Mr. Claydon-Pigott.

Bright beams pierced through the stained-glass windows of the church; played about the brides; danced upon silk and velvet, upon pretty bonnets and prettier faces, upon glad eyes and rosy lips,—making these look joyous, and obliterating all signs of care. The organ pealed forth triumphantly. Hand pressed hand in gratulation. Sorrow would seem a thing impossible. And yet, a smiling countenance doth upon occasion serve to hide

an aching heart. So now. Two hearts there were in that gay crowd which were deeply sad; two hearts which beat in unison, which longed but could not taste, which loved but could not enjoy.

Martin had come for George's sake: Dorothy, that Mrs. Claydon-Pigott might not unduly triumph. And now, these two had met after a separation of many weeks. The glad atmosphere by which they were surrounded made their depression greater, and induced a comparison between what might have been and what was.

So far, they had not exchanged a word. Martin was deterred by thoughts of his altered circumstances. Even were he to be reinstated in Mr. Grierson's good opinion, he was no longer in a position to seek the daughter's hand. Honour forbade him to do that, and pride sided with honour. Both united to render him keenly sensitive as to what the world might say, and caused

him to revolt at the idea of any suspicion being cast upon his motives. It would be better, he reasoned, to leave things as they were ; to give up all claim to Dorothy ; and to pine his miserable life away. In that case, she might perhaps learn to forget, and find a consolation elsewhere. In years to come he might possibly meet her as a friend, rejoice in her happiness, and in it find contentment.

Dorothy had not heard of Martin's altered fortune. She had determined to obey her father in all things, save as to one little reservation, which she held to be due not only to Martin but to herself. She would obey her father, but she must first tell how deep her love, that it would never falter, that she could wait but never change. To tell so much would make them both happier ; would give them something to which they might cling ; would assure Martin that her faith remained unshaken.

Her intention might not be altogether maidenly, but the time had passed when any such consideration could carry weight. Their troth was already plighted. They had become one in the sight of Heaven, if not of man. Dorothy, then, had determined that she would, that very day, convey to her lover this one scrap of present comfort; and, having done so, attempt to endure her lot with patience.

She found him, after breakfast, pacing one of the garden walks,—his head bowed upon his chest, his mind occupied with herself. The path was sheltered and retired, shut off from the lawn which lay between it and the house by a dense, tall screen of laurel.

“Martin,” she whispered softly, as he was about to pass without even a look of recognition.

At the sound of her voice he started, but did not speak.

“Martin,” she continued; “I have so

wanted to see you—just once—to tell you that I have never believed a single word of that horrid letter.”

“God bless you, Dorothy.”

“I still love you—shall do so, always.”

Martin sighed.

“It will be a comfort to you to know that,” she said gently, thinking but of him. “It will bring patience—it will cause the hours to drag less wearily.”

Then, wondering at his silence, she regarded him more attentively.

“But you are ill!” she exclaimed. “You are pale. Oh, Martin, what is it? Tell me.”

This was worse than he had expected. She so evidently loved him. She was so clearly unaware of the barrier which had been interposed between their lives, of his altered fortunes, that he staggered at the thought of what must follow. And yet, better that she should know at once. Better that she should strangle this love

of hers without delay; that she should deem him cold, unworthy, perhaps fore-sworn, than dream about a future which could never be.

“What is it, Martin? ‘Tell me,’” she repeated.

“You must forget me, Dorothy, as I shall try to forget you. You must obey your father. You must find another to love you, for I cannot. Cannot! Ah, no, not that. But—dare not.”

The girl eyed him in almost terror. Could he be mad? Had disappointed love deranged his intellect—his maltreatment by her father banished reason?

“Martin—dear Martin?” she exclaimed.

“Call me Mr. Ffrench,” he returned bitterly. “To you I can be Martin no longer. I am ruined—a beggar. Our marriage is impossible.”

Dorothy gazed at him tearfully.

“You must find some one else to love

you," he went on roughly. "Or, better still, banish all thought of love. For love brings pain and bitter tears. It evades the touch, leaving the heart more lone than ever. It conquers sleep and invokes despair. It deadens the spirit and makes it callous. Yet, pah! Why should I talk to you like this? Go, Dorothy,—go. Forget that I have crossed your life, and try to find happiness elsewhere."

She raised her hand to check his flight, but uselessly. Before she could articulate a word, he was hurrying down the path and was soon lost behind the distant laurels. She stood motionless. She neither swooned nor cried aloud. But a great void filled the place of what had been; she was smitten after a fashion which she dared not, then and there, to contemplate.

Presently, loud shouts reached her from the house, but them she heeded not. Cheer followed upon cheer, but carried no mean-

ing to her stricken brain. The brides were departing on their separate ways—accompanied by showers of rice, and followed by the customary shoe—but she had forgotten their existence. She stood and felt alone—alone on this wide, wide world—save for the pain which crushed her heart.

Fortunately, Martin had presaged this. His first act upon gaining the house was to find Miss Lander; his next to beckon her aside.

“For God’s sake,” he whispered, “go to Dorothy. She is in the long walk behind the laurel hedge.”

Miss Lander looked at him anxiously. His face was livid, and his manner altogether strange.

“What has happened?” she inquired in great alarm.

“Go—go,” he cried. Then, when she had left him, he fled down the drive and forth through the opened gates.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GLOBE-TROTTER TURNS DIPLOMATE.

FLEMING did not wake before eleven; the attendant, engaged by the doctor's order, did not arrive before twelve; so that it was past noon ere the Globe-trotter could turn his back upon Cumberland Villas.

Upon coming to himself, the patient was comparatively rational. This was the first occasion on which he had been so attacked, and, thanks to a good constitution, it was not likely to be the last,—unless, indeed, he were to forego the bottle. But as to that the Globe-trotter shook his head. He knew that men, having once indulged so freely, seldom muster sufficient courage to

break altogether with their foe. In such cases self-respect has fled. The brain is more or less diseased. The victims scatter consequences to the four winds, preferring death to life—a slow suicide to a possibly ripe old age.

And of all deaths theirs is the most miserable. For, as a great moralist hath put it, “Though there are many crimes of a deeper dye than suicide, there is no other by which men appear so formally to renounce the protection of God.” What, too,

“is he who flings his own load off,
And leaves his fellows toiling? Rebel’s right?
Say, rather, the deserter’s.”

The Globe-trotter was pleased to turn from a theme so painful, and leave the object which had incited it far behind. He strode rapidly along, invigorated by the frosty air, each moment more forgetful of the scene that he had quitted. And

soon the exercise, whilst quickening his blood, made him alive to the pangs of hunger. He had neither dined the night before, nor breakfasted that morning. Not really breakfasted, that is, for a cup of tea with a morsel of dry bread had been his only fare ; and he was sufficiently the philosopher to recognize that even the strongest man cannot work when the fires of life burn dim and need replenishment.

That day, moreover, he had a great work to do. He had determined to convince two men of their folly—at no time an easy task—and to secure the happiness of a girl who, now that his mother rested from her labours, was dearer to him than any of her sex. And so, turning into the coffee-room of a decent hotel, he prepared to breakfast sumptuously.

Nor was he pressed for time. He remembered that the double wedding was to happen that morning, and that it must

be late in the afternoon ere he could find any of the three persons upon whose sensibilities he desired to operate. Perhaps it was better thus. Mr. Grierson could not fail to be softened by that morning's ceremony, and to wish that his daughter's love had been equally fortunate. If, upon occasion, he were pugnacious and irritable, he was not above conviction, was a good father, and one who, though prone to error, erred with the best intentions.

Again, Martin, no less than Dorothy, must have been affected. Any other supposition would be contrary to nature. Both were young ; each was deploring the other's loss, each sighing for the unattainable. They would have seen others enjoy fruition, and must have longed to be as they. If not, their hearts were indeed of adamant—their souls incapable of emotion.

So the Globe-trotter breakfasted without undue haste, and afterwards skimmed the

morning's paper in company with his pipe. Then he bethought him of his appearance, which could not have been improved by a night and a day spent as he had spent them. Regarding himself in one of the mirrors which adorned the smoking-room, he found that his beard was unkempt, his hair ruffled, and his linen far from being presentable. That would never do. If not a dandy of the first water, the Globe-trotter possessed an inborn regard for personal proprieties. When a bit of hard work had to be done, he could throw off his jacket, roll up his shirt-sleeves, and fling his cap to the ground without hesitation; but—and this after the manner of all colonials—he was wont, hard work being absent, to consider the outward man. So now, having examined his person in the mirror, he determined to seek the “diggings,”—there to put himself into better trim for the interviews which were to follow.

And no doubt he was right. Self-respect insures consideration : a neglect of personal appearance points to a corresponding absence of personal influence. Foppishness is one thing ; a regard for dress, springing from a belief that man is a reasonable, responsible, soul-animated being, quite another. "Duty before decency," asserted Mr. Midshipman Easy upon a well-known and momentous occasion. Perhaps so. But the more instructive and truer, though possibly not so humorous, apophthegm would have been, "duty with decency."

In any case the Globe-trotter acted on the supposition, and thereby felt the better prepared to beard Mr. Grierson in his study. Not that this his first interview gave him the greatest anxiety,—that arose from a dread lest Martin should prove inflexible, a circumstance that might well occur. Although deeply in love, the lad was proud and self-willed. He had declared that, even

were Mr. Grierson's prohibition to be removed, a still greater obstacle would remain; that he could not, as an almost beggar, put in a claim for Dorothy's hand. In this, no doubt, he was quixotic, absurd, actuated by a mistaken idea of relative values; but none the less the position which he had assumed might be impossible to turn, or at least give an indefinite amount of trouble.

Wrapt in these reflections, the Globe-trotter set out for the Hall, his eyes bent toward the ground, possibility flocking after possibility in a fashion that was most unpleasant. Yet, he was not one to be dismayed. He soon elected to meet one difficulty at a time, and, that surmounted, to face the next. Ultimate discomfiture might rest with Martin, but his present business lay with Mr. Grierson. So—weather-scarred, storm-tossed wrestler that he was—he took “short views of life,” and dismissed all fear of future contingencies.

Arrived at the Hall, he pulled the door-bell with his usual vigour—causing the clapper to strike deliberately yet forcibly, neither excitedly nor feebly, but so as to compel a servant to appear at least two minutes sooner than was his usual habit. Character may be read even in so trivial a matter as the sound of a bell. He that is irritable rings furiously, and creates antipathy. He that is feeble pulls timorously, and is treated with contempt. The resolute alone commands immediate attention, and that without dispute.

“Is Mr. Grierson at home?” inquired the Globe-trotter, when the door had been thrown wide.

“Yes, sir. He returned about a quarter of an hour ago.”

“Then let him know that I should like to have five minutes’ conversation with him.”

“Master is in the study, if you will please to step this way, sir.”

Mr. Grierson was seated in a low chair, his feet upon the fender, his eyes shaded by his left hand. He paid no attention to the opening door, nor raised his head until the Globe-trotter's heavy footfall announced a visitor.

Then the latter saw how pale his face.

"So you have come back, Macpherson," he said wearily. "Better now than never. How are you, man? Take a chair."

"I might be better, Mr. Grierson, and I might be waur."

"An oracular response, and one worthy of your native caution."

"And how is Miss Dorothy?" demanded the Globe-trotter, heedless of the sarcasm.

Mr. Grierson winced; for it was about his daughter that he had been thinking. And his reflections were the reverse of pleasant. His party left the Cedars soon after Martin's disappearance; and during the homeward drive Miss Lander had been silent, whilst

Dorothy looked ill and worn. Mr. Grierson felt that some mischance had occurred—something which had wounded the girl in a vital part.

“She is not so well as I could wish,” he replied quickly, as though eager to dismiss the subject. “Possibly the excitement of the morning has proved too great.”

“An’ yet she was a braw lassie but a few weeks awa’. A bit thing of a wedding oughtna to have put her about.”

Again Mr. Grierson winced.

“You may not be aware,” he said, “that her engagement is at an end.”

“I heard something o’ the kind,” assented the Globe-trotter.

“Then you may also have heard that Mr. Ffrench has proved utterly undeserving—that he has formed an unfortunate connection, and refuses to abandon it.”

“An’ if sae much had been tauld me,”

retorted the Globe-trotter evasively, "I shouldna ha' gien it another thought."

"But I have ascertained it to be true," cried Mr. Grierson; "and the fellow himself does not deny it."

"Maybe he wasna asked for an explanation i' the right road."

This was to touch Mr. Grierson in a tender place,—in the very spot where he felt most weak—so he retreated to a stronger position.

"I had an interview with Copeland," he said with dignity; "and found that the information which I had received was unfortunately but too correct."

"Where from did ye obtain the information?"

"From a letter which came by post—from an evident well-wisher to the family—from a person whose testimony was most circumstantial."

"And ye no ken the writer's name?"

“Unfortunately, no. But it was no doubt withheld for obvious reasons.”

“Weel, I can tell ye.”

Mr. Grierson eyed the speaker curiously, wondering not only at his words, but apparent calm. The calm, however, was not for long.

“Maybe, I can tell ye,” repeated the Globe-trotter, with sparkling eyes and heightened colour. “It came frae a villain, wha cares nae mair about the family than a pair of auld shoon; wha glories that ye’ve turned the poor lad awa’; wha hates as none but a fause loon can hate.”

The other sat breathless in his chair. “How do you know this?” he inquired after a pause.

“From his ain sel’.”

“But Minnie, Macpherson? Copeland told me that Ffrench owned to a knowledge of the girl’s whereabouts.”

“And what for no? Nae doubt the lad

put her out o' Fleming's reach—gied her a chance, like enough, o' turning an honest penny."

Mr. Grierson was bewildered. He scarcely knew what to think. He had nursed his animosity against Martin for so long that now it was almost impossible to pluck it suddenly from his breast.

"But Minnie!" he argued. "What you say about her is nothing but supposition."

"And what for no? Ane part o' the story being a lee, the other part is its ain brother."

"Possibly, but not assuredly."

The Globe-trotter threw a half-pitying, half-scornful glance at his companion.

"Did ye ever ken the lad to tell a lee?" he demanded angrily.

"Never."

"Then, for God's sake, man, gie him the benefit o' the doubt."

Mr. Grierson still hesitated.

"Think o' your ain flesh," put in the

Globe-trotter diplomatically. "Think o' Miss Dorothy."

The words recalled his daughter's haggard cheek and pain-enduring eyes; recalled her once gay laugh. And, if what the Globe-trotter stated was true, her life had been blighted without a sufficient warranty. The thought suggested possibilities that he dared not face. He felt that had his wife been living she would have counselled peace. Then, with a recollection of his lost one's faith and hope and charity, came stealing upon him a softer mood. The fire loomed dimly behind his tears. His heart melted "as silver is melted in the midst of the furnace."

"What would you have me to do, Macpherson?" he inquired gently.

"Write to the lad, an' let things be as they were. Trust him as ye did afore, an' nae doubt ye'll soon ken about Minnie. The lass is a good lass, an' not sic as ye have thought."

Mr. Grierson took up his pen, and was about to follow the Globe-trotter's suggestion when the latter exclaimed—

“It's but right ye should understand that there may be difficulties. Fleming has stripped the lad of amaist a' his gear. He's got but ten thousand pounds that he can ca' his own.”

“What difference can that make?”

“He thinks that he canna, with honour to his ain sel', ask ye for Miss Dorothy.”

“Miss Dorothy has enough for both. You may tell him that much.”

“Then, in Heaven's name, write awa',” cried the Globe-trotter, grasping the other's hand.

And so, Mr. Grierson wrote:—

“DEAR FFRENCH,

“It appears that I have been labouring under a mistake. Forgive me for having misunderstood your character,

and attribute my doing so to a too-great care for Dorothy. I can say no more, except that Dorothy is very sad."

"Will that do?" he inquired, offering the letter to Macpherson.

"Naething could be better."

"Then take it yourself, and be sure that he gets it to-night."

So far, so good. But the Globe-trotter contemplated yet another interview before he could feel armed at all points.

"An' now, Mr. Grierson," he said, "I would like to see Miss Dorothy. I doubt she's fallen in wi' the lad this vera day, an' that it's made her waur. Belike, too, I'd best see her by mysel'."

"You will find her in the boudoir, Macpherson."

Yes; she was in the boudoir—in the same dress which she had worn at the wedding; her bonnet still lying on the sofa where she

had tossed it in her misery ; her dark eyes glowing with the fever which burned within. Her hands were resting listlessly on her lap ; her heart was stupefied by the vastness of her grief.

Not that Dorothy was one to give way to a useless despair. But for the time she was altogether shaken and deranged. The blow had fallen too suddenly for her to rally quite at once. It had been so terrible—so antagonistic to her scheme for Martin's good—that the suffering which it had brought was beyond control. The potion itself had been bitter, but its after-taste was worse. And, alas, it was her lover who had presented the cup, who had turned that which was sweet to bitterness.

Macpherson entered the room noiselessly, and gazed at her long time and silently. A tear rose to his old, weather-beaten eye—a tear which had its source in a tender yearning.

“Eh, the puir thing,” he muttered;
“sae young, an’ yet sae full of wae. But,

“My blessin’s upon thy sweet wee lippie;
My blessin’s upon thy bonny ee-brie!

* * * *

Thou’s aye the dearer and dearer to me!’

Eh, but it’s something vera sad that weighs her doon. I doubt the lad has gied her the de’il’s ain flaw.”

“Hoot, lassie! Cheer up,” he exclaimed, seeing that she did not stir. “It’s a lang lane that has nae turning.”

She raised her head, and smiled faintly.

“Is it you, Mr. Macpherson? I scarcely expected to see you again so soon. But you are none the less welcome on that account.”

“And to-day, lassie, I should be doubly welcome. I’ve that in my pocket as ought to bring comfort even to the comfortless.”

She sighed. How could any comfort avail her now?

“I’ve been mair successful than I could

have expected. I've unearthed the writer of that miserable lee. I've been wi' your father, an' the lad is to return hither without a speck upon his character."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed fervently. "I knew that he was blameless. But oh, Mr. Macpherson, it is too late—too late."

"Too late! And why too late?"

"Because he has cast me off, and told me to console myself with another. How could he be so cruel?"

The Globe-trotter was staggered. His surmise, then, had been correct, and Martin himself was the cause of her trouble. "Drat the lad," he thought angrily. "He's brought tears where they should be nane. He's sowed naught but sorrel, when he should ha' ploughed-in wheat."

"But he ne'er said that he'd forgotten ye," he resumed aloud. "He ne'er said that he'd ceased to love ye."

"No," she returned reflectively. "Not

quite that. I wished to comfort him, but he would not listen. I tried to retain him, but he would not stop."

If the Globe-trotter had ever been angered against Martin, he was angered then. "The loon!" he muttered to himself. "How could he frighten the puir bairn so fairly? Why not have kept his ain counsel, and bided a wee?"

His first care was to soothe the girl whom he had learned to regard with a tenderness most strange in one so gnarled. Ah, well! Perhaps the gnarled old stem is not always so hard within as its tough-looking bark might lead the traveller to expect. Possibly its joy is of a higher type than that of its more youthful, more precocious brother,—a "joy whose hand is ever at its lips bidding adieu," set round with "sunset colours," and finding a best reflection of the sweet past in the bright young lives which attend its quick declension.

“He’s a noble lad,” exclaimed the Globe-trotter with what good will he could muster. “He wanted to sacrifice himself for you. He thought that, with his fortune so sairly altered, he ought to leave you free.”

“But what has fortune to do with it, Mr. Macpherson?”

“Exactly what your father remarked, Miss Dorothy. He said that you had money enough for baith.”

Dorothy looked wistfully at the fire which blazed so merrily in the grate.

“If only he loved me,” she whispered, yet not in so low a tone as to prevent the Globe-trotter from catching her words.

“Of course he loves you,” exclaimed the old man impulsively. “There’s nae doubt o’ that. And—and now, Miss Dorothy. I’d like ye to do me the least bit of a favour.”

She raised her face to his inquiringly.

“I’d like ye to drop the lad a line, an’ tell him to come back.”

The girl flushed to the roots of her hair. "No, not that, Mr. Macpherson. I cannot do that."

"Just one word," pleaded the Globe-trotter. "It needna be mair nor that."

"But, he has rejected me—turned his back upon me," she said.

"He didna ken what he was about. See, lassie, here's a letter frae your father praying that bygones may be bygones. But the lad is full o' mettle, an' I doubt whether he'll listen to any reasons that I can gie. I ken but one thing able to bring him back, an' that's yoursel'."

Dorothy's expression grew more wistful, more tender—and yet, she hesitated. She feared lest her lover might deem her forward; dreaded lest the course proposed might be unmaidenly.

"Dinna be proud, lassie," continued the Globe-trotter. "Pride has helped over many to their fall. Take the advice of one

who kens nae law but that of his Creator, and wha would spill his best blood to do you service. Dinna be proud, lassie. Say the word, and a' may yet be well."

He trembled in his eagerness; tears again glistened in his eyes; he was pleading on behalf of the two beings whom most he loved.

"I ken a' that you must feel," he went on; "but think of a' that I must suffer if the lad be nae less proud than yoursel'."

Dorothy glanced timidly at the scarred face. It looked so truthful, so self-forgetful, so solicitous for her, that she could no longer hesitate. Hastening to her writing-table, she seized a scrap of note-paper, and wrote thereon three words—

"Dear Martin,—come."

Fortified with his credentials, the Globe-trotter returned to the Widow Toler's, but did not immediately proceed to Martin's room. He ascertained, however, that the

lad was within, and would dine at home that evening. Such being the case, it would be better not to startle him too suddenly, but to wait for a convenient season; until after dinner, for instance, when matters can be viewed in their rosier guise. Not that Martin was likely to have any great appetite, or to be in the happiest of tempers. The Globe-trotter recollected that earlier in the day he had done despite to his love; and, knowing that, could apprehend his then condition. But the Globe-trotter himself preferred delay. He had just returned from a couple of interviews which had taxed him sorely. And although he had emerged victorious from both, he was somewhat shaken, and an ante-prandial pipe would help to steady his nerves for this next and last encounter.

So, turning into his sitting-room, he lighted a pipe and, sinking into his accustomed chair, delivered himself to the cur-

rent of his reflections. At first these were partly cheerful, partly tinged with fear. But, as minute followed upon minute, the more cheery portion ousted the more fearful. Successes already obtained foreshadowed successes yet to come. They always do. A conquering host is ever brave: a defeated one disheartened. From whence it happened that the Globe-trotter smoked and thought, until his eyes twinkled merrily and a smile of contentment played about his lips.

It was not until after dinner, and when the "slavey" had cleared the table, that he commenced his attack, and then with the utmost caution.

"Weel, lad," he began, "I've not told ye about Fleming. He couldna have been much worse."

"Poor fellow," returned Martin abstractedly.

"I suppose, now, he's not in want o' siller?"

“Not he.”

“Then, he’s a dead man. He’ll be nae forced to work, an’ work would be his ane cure.”

Martin made no reply. He had scarcely heard the other’s last words, much less grasped their meaning. He was too sad to think of aught save his own trouble.

“He’s been but a poor friend,” continued the Globe-trotter presently. “He wrote that letter to Grierson; and glories, the fause loon, in what he did.”

“I thought as much,” said Martin, his tone the while betraying complete indifference.

“But I’ve set ye right, lad. I’ve made Grierson see the thing to be a lee. I’ve been closeted with him this afternoon, an’ he’s sent you this.”

Here the Globe-trotter, producing the first of the two letters with which he had been charged, handed it to Martin.

The latter read it slowly, dwelling upon its every word. Then, a sad smile flitted across his face.

“Too late, Globe-trotter,” he sighed,—
“too late.”

“And why too late?”

“Because I am more than half-ruined—because I am not in a position to keep a wife.”

“Nonsense, lad. D’ye set mair value on a bit o’ siller than on a loving heart? D’ye think when siller’s taken wings, love must follow in its wake? That’s but a poor philosophy, man.”

“I cannot bring myself to sue *in formâ pauperis*, Globe-trotter.”

“Hoot, lad! Ye’re too nice. Ye’d best thank yer Creator for a’ His mercies, an’ gather the manna provided for ye without a murmur.”

Martin returned no answer. Pride is mostly unwilling to recognize a distasteful truth.

“Grierson kens about your want o’ siller, an’ tauld me to say that Miss Dorothy has enough for baith.”

But Martin’s heart was hardened. He had worked himself into a belief that his was a noble abnegation, and that any departure from his purpose would be disgrace. Least of all did he relish the idea of being beholden to a man who had so distrusted him.

The Globe-trotter perceived that to insure success he must produce his full credentials.

“There are others to consider beside yoursel’,” he went on. “There’s Miss Dorothy, now.”

Martin knew that without being told. But he was trying, poor fellow, to efface her image from his thought, and resented even the mention of her name.

“I have informed Dorothy,” he said coldly, “that she is free; that she can never be mine, and must find happiness elsewhere.”

“Hoot, man! but ye canna rule the waves—ye canna stay the wind—with a’ your pride. An’ nae mair can words alane still the throbbing of a lassie’s breast. See, man; she’s sent ye a bit note.”

Whilst speaking, the Globe-trotter had drawn Dorothy’s letter from his pocket, and now handed it to his companion with a jealous tenderness.

Martin took it between his trembling fingers. Love warred with pride. Self battled with unselfishness. Memories of past delicious hours, of fond glances, of holy aspirations, of heart responding to heart, surged through his brain—causing what had just now been drear to become alluring: converting what had been a desert into sunny meads.

“Dear Martin,—come.”

Macpherson noticed the quivering lip, and smiled complacently. He knew that the spell was working, and needed no

assistance that he could give. He sat quietly—waiting for what might follow.

Martin laid Dorothy's letter on the table, and fell into a deep, long muse.

"Globe-trotter," he exclaimed after a while, "I must be off to bed. The anxieties of to-day have been such that I can determine nothing to-night. I must sleep over the matter, and with the dawn is certain to come light."

"Aye, laddie, go. May your dreams be pleasant, an' may God bless ye—baith."

When Martin had left the room, the Globe-trotter noted with a smile that Dorothy's letter no longer lay upon the table.

CHAPTER V.

“OUT OF THE DEPTHS.”

MARTIN had said, “with the dawn is certain to come light—” words which, taken in their literal sense, cannot be regarded as other than a truism: when in their metaphorical, as shadowing a possibility. But that evening the possibility remained vague, obscured by the thick mists of doubt.

The young fellow retired to his room, but not to find sleep. He flung himself into bed and wooed forgetfulness, but to no purpose. Thought crowded after thought, vision followed after vision, and that without a pause. His blood became heated, his nerves excited, making rest impossible.

He settled himself first in this position, next in that; now closed his eyes, now opened them full-wide; counted up to thousands, checking off each hundred as achieved upon his fingers,—yet, if anything, he felt more wakeful than before.

He lighted a candle and attempted to read; but his mind flew from the page, wandering in the very direction which most he desired to avoid.

No. He could not sue *in formâ pauperis*. Were he to do that, the world would meet him with its sneers, his self-respect would take wings, he should not only despise himself, but be despised. Then came a gentle voice whispering in his ear—"Dear Martin,—come."

One thing, and one thing alone, he was able to determine. He would give up business. He could not reconcile himself to the idea of working upon borrowed capital. He could not accept the Globe-

trotter's kind offer when uncertain of his own powers. The ghosts of a buried past, of his predecessors in Fosset Lane, came trooping by in long array,—some with pig-tails, some with powdered hair, in blue tail-coats gay with bright buttons, in breeches and top-boots, or tight-fitting pantaloons. And yet, however dressed, all with the same cast of features, the same firm expression about the mouth, a ready intelligence about the eye.

He recognized but too plainly that he was not as they: that his training had not been as theirs. At the age when they had been poring over ledgers, journals, and cash-books, he was studying the Greek particle and tracing the lost digamma. At the time of life when they had mastered the intricacies of an office, he was flying across country or bringing down the pheasants which rocketed above his head. The phantoms which now trooped past had dined at three,

and worked late into the night, with but one object in life,—following that, too, with an intensity of purpose which no side-wind could deflect. He, on the contrary, dismissed all thought of work at five, dined at eight, was carried hither and thither by the slightest breeze.

Nor were times as once they had been. Greater competition and smaller profits had become universal. Nay. Happy the man who could secure a profit, however small, and avoid a loss.

Psha! Were he to continue in business, he should lose even the little capital which had survived the wreck. Far better to invest his money with those who had more powerful brains than his, and leave to them the onus of providing him with an income on which to live. After all, money-grubbing was not the sole intent of life—although one most necessary—nor was he suited for the work. It was foreign to his nature

to haggle over eighths of a penny, over charter parties and return-commissions; to tell white lies or, worse still, black ones; to distrust his neighbours, and to deem each man with whom he was brought into contact a rogue. When these phantoms had pursued their calling, no necessity for such tortuous means existed. They could obtain a profit, yet tell the truth: could give full measure, yet earn their daily bread. Now, that was all changed. Syndicates had arisen to promote large companies, to pocket huge commissions, and leave their fledglings either to sink or swim. And of these companies, alas,—at least so thought Martin—too many had learnt to swim, the which, striking out in all directions, had distanced the private trader.

Then, were he to leave business, he need not on that account be altogether idle. So long as he remained at Camptown he would continue to attend the night-school at

Barton. He— But with a recollection of the night-school came thoughts of Dorothy. He remembered that she had first directed his steps thither; and, whilst he so thought, her voice continued to whisper in his ear—"Dear Martin,—come."

How could he come? Why did her words thus torment him? He was more than half-ruined: to seek her now would be to court a well-deserved opprobrium. And yet, with all his pride, he remained powerless to stay the wind—to still the gentle voice that repeated in his ear—"Dear Martin,—come." Even, as he fell asleep, the words were still flitting about his pillow.

Then came morning, and that so soon as to make him doubt whether he had closed his eyes. At all events, when he awoke, the sun was streaming through the blind, and the birds were piping joyously. He, too, felt inclined to sing, for darkness

had fled, and his reflections had assumed a roseate hue. As the lesson, imperfectly retained the night before, comes fluent and indelible with recurring day, so his vague aspirations had taken determined form. A morbid fear as to what the world might say had given place to a sounder judgment. An intense eagerness for Dorothy's happiness had fired his blood,—obliterating all selfish motives; rendering him solicitous as to the future of that priceless treasure which, but yesterday, he had thought to cast aside.

“Thank God,” he exclaimed, “that with a new day has come a better wisdom; that I can esteem Dorothy's love to be more valuable than pride, a thing to be considered before a few short-lived sneers. And if the world should say that I have married for money, what then? That cannot make it true.”

During breakfast, the Globe-trotter eyed

him curiously, although satisfied with a slight inspection. He recognized the Martin of former days,—the frank, generous lad who first had attracted his friendship, and afterwards had awakened a deeper interest than any man with whom he had been associated during a long and varied pilgrimage. "God bless them baith," muttered the old fellow, when he had scanned the other's happy face.

Sudden conversions similar to that which had overtaken Martin are by no means infrequent. *À fortiori*, they cannot be unnatural. Many have elected to refer the solution of their difficulties to "Nature's sweet nurse," nor been disappointed. Indeed, Martin's conversion was nothing more than the Globe-trotter expected. But the latter was too wise to run any risk of breaking the spell by alluding to the circumstance. He had kept a discreet silence, and awaited the *dénouement*, con-

tenting himself with glancing from time to time across the table—becoming, after each glance, more satisfied than before.

When Martin had finished breakfast he remained in his chair, beating time on the cloth with a teaspoon. His thoughts had taken a far flight, and were ranging over distant hills, nearer, maybe, to the pure heaven above than to the more sordid earth beneath; until at last he murmured—

“In what land the sun does visit
Brisk are we, whate’er betide:
To give space for wandering is it
That the world was made so wide.”

Clearly, the Ajax was forgotten—possibly not again to be remembered.

“Those are brave words, lad,” remarked Macpherson.

Martin blushed. “Yes, Globe-trotter. I learnt them when a boy; and now, when the world wags its old head cheerfully, I sometimes repeat them to myself.”

"Globe-trotter," he continued presently;
 "I shall go to the Hall this morning."

"Aye, lad, do. They'll be glad to see ye."

As soon as he could do so decently, Martin set forth. It was almost spring, and to him it seemed as if Nature had no object but to share his joy. Yesterday she had frowned with lowering brow: now, she had decked herself with smiles, and his heart responded to her better humour. The wayfarer, whom he met, turned to regard his passing figure,—so light his step, so bright his look. Each tree and shrub appeared to welcome him as a friend. Even the butler did not receive him at the door as an everyday visitor.

"Miss Dorothy?" inquired Martin.

"You will find her in the boudoir, sir."

Yes. Dorothy was in her boudoir, anxiously expecting what the coming hours might bring. She doubted whether she had done wisely—doubted whether what she had done would be productive of a good result.

When the Globe-trotter had left her the previous evening, her anxiety returned. His kindly support removed, she became once more apprehensive, without any self-sustaining force. And now, as the door opened, she glanced timidly towards it, scarce knowing whether to hope or fear. But one look was sufficient. She recognized the bright, open smile which she had learnt to love; the same dancing eyes; the old, cheery manner. She felt instinctively that a long-fled happiness had returned; that her lover had doffed his melancholy and subdued his pride.

She rose eagerly, and advanced to meet him with outstretched hands.

“At last, dear Martin!” she cried, resting her head upon his shoulder.

“At last, Dorothy.

“Thank God that you have come.”

“Let us both do that, and out of a full heart.”

Thenceforward the hours sped quickly. Day succeeded day, and week succeeded week, but did not bring satiety. They never do to those who truly love, whose twin hearts beat in unison, and whose only care is the other's weal. A well-known author, now gathered to his fathers, once wrote that, to be alone with the girl to whom he is not engaged is a man's delight. When a thing is settled there is always present to him something of a feeling of clipped wings. The certainty becomes repressive. He has done his work, and gained his victory,—and by conquering has become a slave. He has no new confidence to make,—unless when he comes to tell her that he likes his meat well done, and wants his breakfast to be punctual.

But is it so? At least, is it so with the best men? Surely not. When once these love, they love till death. Each year but deepens the intensity of their feeling,

although it may detract something of its outer fire. To be cynical is easy. Cynicism enchants the many, and therefore pays; but not on that account is it necessarily irrefragable. Such cynicism as the above would not, for instance, apply to Martin. The more he saw of Dorothy, the more he was attracted: the longer he studied her character, the greater his devotion. Step by step his comprehension of her nature took a wider range, and became akin to veneration. He recognized in her a temple fashioned without hands, bearing an impress, howsoever faint, of its great Projector.

So it came about that one afternoon, shortly after their reunion, Martin and Dorothy were strolling along the path which skirted the meadows—that path which Dorothy had trod so often, sometimes in thankfulness, sometimes with weary steps. But this day in thankfulness. For she could hang on Martin's arm, look

into his face, stoop down to pluck now here now there an early violet, nor experience a wish beyond the present.

"Martin," she exclaimed suddenly. "How wicked of Mr. Fleming to pretend that you loved some one else!"

"Have you not forgotten that old story, Dorothy?"

He did not know—he was too inexperienced to know—that stories such as that sometimes cling to a woman's breast even when she has thought to have cast them out.

"Well, yes," replied Dorothy. "I had forgotten it until this minute."

"But one portion of the story, dear, was true. I did run away with a girl. A pretty girl, too," he added maliciously.

"What nonsense, old boy. You say that to make me jealous."

"I am not joking," returned Martin gravely. "I enticed from her lodgings a

girl called Minnie Railton, with whom, I think, Fleming was in love himself."

"How could you be so wicked?" sobbed Dorothy. "But I do not believe it," she cried, smiling through her tears. "I will never believe it."

Martin put his arm round her waist, and she did not seek to evade the touch.

"I ran away with her, dear, because I thought it better for her future. I ran away with her with the one object of putting her in a place of safety."

"And you do not love her, Martin? Not one little bit?"

"Not one little bit."

Dorothy nestled closer to his side. "Tell me about it," she said.

"Minnie must do that. I want you to see her."

"Is she quite a proper person?" asked the girl with a little shiver. "Are you quite sure that—that papa would like me to go?"

"You little goose! I would not for worlds take you to a place where afterwards you might regret to have been."

"No," said Dorothy, partly reassured.

"Have you any engagement to-morrow?"

"No," said Dorothy.

"Then ask Miss Lander to drive with us, and I will take you to see Minnie."

Dorothy acquiesced, but did so with a fluttering heart. She had heard that Minnie was a model; and, although she had never seen an example of the species, she pictured to herself that a model must necessarily be something very dreadful, something from which she would shrink, which would be both bold-eyed and loud-tongued, an Amazon in petticoats, given to boisterous mirth, and not very particular as to conduct. So for the rest of that day, and all the following morning, Dorothy was troubled. She did not like to refuse so trifling a request, but would far rather that

it had not been preferred. And yet, along with her distaste was mixed just a shade of curiosity.

“I wrote to Minnie last night,” observed Martin, as on the following afternoon they were driven from the door, “telling her when to expect us. It would never do to find the bird absent from her nest.”

Dorothy could have wished that he had not been so thoughtful. In that case a possibility might have existed of the “bird” being on the wing. Nevertheless she endeavoured to stifle such rebellious feelings.

“It was very good of you,” she said, “to take so much trouble.”

Dorothy did not talk much during the drive, but lay back on the cushions and wondered what manner of woman she was about to see. She hoped that Martin had not been very fond of her—would never be fond of her. And then she blushed at her want of faith, calling to mind how noble

her lover's conduct had ever been, and how impossible it was that he could love another.

They passed the great hospital standing in the centre of the town, and turned into a narrow, quiet street. The houses on its either side were brick-built, smoke-begrimed, past their zenith. Yet they conveyed a notion of respectability,—exhibiting brass plates upon their doors, half-blinds in their windows, clean steps, and burnished knockers. Once they had been the town houses of Camptown merchants; now they formed the habitat of physicians, of surgeons, of dentists, of teachers of music, and teachers of languages.

The carriage stopped before one larger than the rest—one with two windows on each side the door, with five windows on the first floor, and five on the second. Between the last-mentioned rows was a long board, extending the width of the house, on which, written in large yellow

letters on a black ground, were the words—
“ Training Institute for Nurses.”

Dorothy regarded the inscription wonderingly. “ What,” she marvelled, “ could there be in common between an artist’s model and an institute for nurses ? ”

“ Is this the place ? ” she inquired.

“ The very place,” returned Martin, amused at her perplexity. “ I say, Dorothy, have you brought a card ? ”

She gave him one ; and then, springing from the carriage, he rang the bell.

“ Now, Dorothy, jump out,” he exclaimed.
“ You will not find Minnie so very terrible.”

Martin handed the card to a maid who opened the door.

“ A lady,” he said, “ to see Miss Railton.”

“ You are coming with me ? ” cried Dorothy, noticing with alarm that he was returning to the carriage.

“ No, dear, not to-day. You had better see the girl alone.”

And, before she could make any farther remonstrance, the door was closed, leaving her in a somewhat dark passage.

"This way, miss," said the maid, ushering the visitor into a room on the left, and which was evidently a dining-room.

It was untenanted, and plainly, though comfortably, furnished. A few prints adorned the walls; the carpet was a faded Turkey; the chairs, table, and sideboard, were of old mahogany, and of so antique a pattern that they might well be coeval with the house. But each article was clean and in its place; a little prim, perhaps, but well cared for.

Dorothy had ample leisure in which to make any observations, for she remained in undisturbed possession of the apartment for at least five minutes. Possibly she was not the only one who dreaded the coming interview. Possibly Minnie's heart fluttered as much as did her own: possibly she, too,

required a few moments in which to steel her nerves.

But at last the door was gently opened, and the girls stood face to face.

Minnie was thinner than when she frequented the studio. The colour upon her cheek was not so bright. And yet, if her cheek had lost something of its brilliancy, her face had gained in purity. The fair hair was neatly smoothed on either side the white forehead. The blue eyes, though telling of a sorrow never to be forgotten, were full of tenderness. A smile still rested about the mouth, but was more chastened than of old. If she had suffered, it was clear that she had not done so without finding resignation. The love which had proved so vain, which had caused her to shed so many and bitter tears, might still—nay, did—survive; but it had been subdued by that more universal sister-love which tends to obliterate self in an eager

yearning over the pains, the woes, of fellow-sufferers.

She advanced a few steps into the room, and, after one hurried glance at Dorothy, stood with eyes bent upon the carpet. The light given by the windows fell upon her trim figure,—upon her dark dress and spotless bib and apron, upon her fair hair and neat cap, upon her little hands and plain, snow-white linen cuffs. In sooth she was a fit model for the best of artists, yet few among the brotherhood could have caught her pose.

Dorothy looked at her in astonishment. This, then, was that Minnie whom Martin was said to have preferred to herself, whom he had hidden from the world, about whom so much evil had been bandied from mouth to mouth. Instead of being repelled, she felt attracted: she recognized a pure and noble woman. And Dorothy's heart, at no time very flinty, went out towards her.

Minnie, still holding Dorothy's card, gave it a last look, and then raised her head.

"So you are Dorothy—Miss Grierson, I mean," she said, blushing at the slip.

"Yes; I am Dorothy. But how did you learn my name?"

"*He* told me."

"He told her," thought Dorothy. And she regarded the girl searchingly. But the blue eyes met her own, fearlessly: no trace of shame was to be read in their clear depths.

"Why did he tell you?" she inquired in a low voice.

"I was very sad. He found me, and told me that he, too, had once been sad; that his love had been rejected; that he had tried to work in order to banish sorrow, but that his work had been in vain. Then had come a sweet sister who explained how it was that he had wrought to no purpose; who showed that his work had been for self

and not for others. He said that sister's name was Dorothy—yourself, Miss Grierson. And, oh, when I was in trouble, Mr. Ffrench was so kind—so very kind.”

Tears stood in the blue eyes, and the pretty lips quivered. The girl could not have stifled these things, even had she tried. But she did not attempt to do so—her thoughts were too busy with the past. She saw Martin as he had stood before her that well-remembered afternoon; heard once more the gentle inflexions of his voice; recalled his every word; thought of her deep yet hopeless love. Small wonder that the blue eyes filled, and that the lips quivered.

But this time it was not before Martin that she bared her heart,—to Martin forgetful of himself, yet unthinking of her love. It was to a sister, to a woman able to understand what woman feels, to a woman who loved, and therefore could discern love.

Dorothy doubted not a moment. The sad page stood open, and she could decipher its every word; read in it the story of a devotion unreturned, yet pure; of a generous heart attempting to comfort where comfort was impossible.

She bowed her head in shame to think that she had for a moment doubted; and, then, her whole soul rushed forth towards the stricken, uncomplaining one who stood confronting her.

“Yes, Minnie,” she said very tenderly, “Martin is always kind. But he is more than kind. He is noble—generous. His heart is set upon doing good, and seeks another’s rather than its own well-being.”

“He will find happiness with you, Miss Grierson.”

“Call me Dorothy, dear. You must always call me Dorothy.”

And Minnie called her Dorothy. After which they sat confiding to each other many

things, and for so long that Martin began to wonder what they could be talking about.

But he was never told. There exist deep secrets in every breast which ought to be veiled even from the best-beloved; which to reveal would be almost sacrilege, but upon which the soul loves to feed, which it fondly cherishes and calls its own.

Over secrets such as these Dorothy brooded on the homeward drive. She was quiet and subdued. She did not speak, except to answer some question put by Martin. Her heart was too deeply stirred. She dreamed rather than thought. And along with her dreams came a great gladness—a gladness unflecked by the slightest cloud; came, too, a haloed vision of Martin, always generous, always true; came, too, a deep thankfulness for that he was hers, and that she was his,—that he had proved faithful under trial: had done nothing which could divide their hearts.

Martin saw that she was thus wrapt, and made no further attempt to disturb her reverie. Only, when parting at the Hall, he said—

“Dorothy, you will be kind to Minnie for my sake.”

“Not for your sake alone, Martin, but because she has won my love.”

CHAPTER VI.

HEART RESPONDETH TO HEART.

TEN years, or thereabout, had passed since that visit to the Nurses' Institute—ten years, dragging wearily for some, skipping merrily for others, pregnant with change to all. Meantime, Death had of course been busy; nor, whilst pursuing his Dance Macaber, did he forget some who have appeared in the preceding pages.

Miss Lander was the first to be summoned, but, ere that, she had been closeted with Mr. Plunket, the lawyer, and completed a last will and testament.

“Circumstances have altered,” she explained, “and I have determined to make

a fresh disposition of my property. I intend to bequeath all that I stand possessed of, both real estate and personalty, to Martin Ffrench. Let the will be short and to the point."

"My dear madam," pleaded the learned gentleman, to whose professional instincts these terse instructions were anything but acceptable,—“My dear madam, may not Miss Dorothy—Mrs. Ffrench, I ought to say—your almost adopted child, feel hurt by no mention of her name? A few thousands, now; or say a few hundreds, would——”

“Dorothy,” interrupted the old lady, “has money and to spare. Martin has none too much.”

“If I might advise,” persisted the lawyer.

“Which you have not been asked to do, sir.”

“Still, might it not be desirable—I simply throw out the suggestion—to give

Mr. Ffrench a life interest in the estate, and to appoint trustees who shall—— ”

“ It would be more to the purpose, sir, were you to abstain from introducing irrelevant matter into the conversation. Mr. Ffrench shall have no cause to believe that he was but half trusted.”

Bootless to say, Miss Lander proved obstinate; and at her death Martin found himself a rich man. To the very last, she dropped no hint as to this disposition of her property, fearing, no doubt, that were she to do so the legatee might remonstrate more vigorously than had the lawyer. Then, old ladies—especially single ones—dislike to have even their slightest wish opposed.

Within three years of Miss Lander's death, Mr. Grierson passed away. This was a hard blow to Dorothy. She and Martin had lived with her father since their marriage, ministering to his wants; making his home, which but for their

presence would have been so cheerless, bright and comfort-bearing. She sorrowed, and that deeply, thankful, nevertheless, that an arm remained to which she could cling ; that a husband survived whose sympathy was very precious.

And Mr. Grierson, no less than Miss Lander, had made a will—one precise in its terms, and minute even in its smallest detail, which rejoiced Mr. Plunket's heart, and foreshadowed a very cartload of as yet embryo documents. Mr. Grierson would not have been Mr. Grierson had he acted otherwise. In any will that bore his signature, every possible contingency would of necessity be provided against. For, not only was Mr. Plunket an able lawyer, but Mr. Grierson was a man of great experience. Their two heads, when put together, must be as a perfect "house of life," as a most fortuitous conjunction of the heavenly bodies. If, by their combined

efforts, property could not be tightly secured even unto the second generation, it would be useless for ordinary persons to attempt success where they had failed. And so, with the assistance of Mr. Plunket, Mr. Grierson made a will.

He gave ten thousand pounds to Martin in token of his personal esteem, and a contingent annuity of two thousand should he become a widower. That done, the residue of his property was left in trust for the benefit of his daughter, whilst living; at her death to be divided amongst her children,—the share of each son to be double that of each daughter. Failing issue of her body lawfully begotten, the whole was to revert to Martin, his heirs, and assigns. In case her issue deceased, failing to leave issue of its body lawfully begotten, the property was also to revert to Martin, his heirs, and assigns. Should all issue, heirs, and assigns, as hereinbefore specified, fail—

a contingency which, as Mr. Plunket wisely remarked, had occurred, and therefore might occur—the estate lapsed to the Camptown Hospital.

But, as to the last-named clause becoming operative Mr. Grierson had no great fear. For several months before his death a little Dorothy and younger Martin had clambered about his knee, calling him “grandpapa.” Moreover, unless appearances were deceptive, this little Dorothy and younger Martin were not destined to be the last scions of their race.

Lastly, and about two years ago, had occurred another death—one which had deprived Martin of a father. Squire Ffrench, though to all seeming lusty enough, and able to endure any amount of exposure, had fallen by mischance into a flooded brook, and thereafter had taken a chill. The wind at the time was easterly, bringing with it one of those black, hungry-looking

afternoons which form the bane of an English spring. Friends advised him to ride quickly home, but he was not one to take advice. Nay, the oftener it was suggested that he ought to jump without delay into dry clothing, the more determined he became to continue with the hounds. This was no doubt a foolish, pig-headed thing to do, but squires who have helped to rule their country-side for thirty years are apt to be pig-headed. In any case, poor Mr. Ffrench was pig-headed once too often; and acute inflammation, supervening to the chill, hurried him to his grave.

Although dying peaceably in the home of his selection—surrounded by his wife, his sons, his daughters—he could not but feel that the great object of his life remained unfulfilled: that most probably it would never be fulfilled. He had lived in a hope that his elder son would become a squire like himself,—a justice of the peace, a

deputy-lieutenant, a knight of the shire, and, when the time came, high-sheriff. He had trusted that his elder son would succeed him at the Hall, and that his aging eyes might dwell fondly upon that elder son's eldest son. But it was not to be. Arthur preferred the Church to county position, the Rectory to the Hall; and, worse still, his two only children were daughters. The squire, then, died peaceably, but not without knowing "the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."

Shortly after his death, Martin, with Dorothy's consent, broke up the establishment at Camptown, and returned to Chudleigh. He rented the Hall and a small home-farm from Arthur; rented from other people as much shooting as he could get, and kept as many horses in the stable as he could ride. Yet not on that account did he grow into an idle man. He attended to county business, and took an active

interest in parochial matters. His means were ample, and he enjoyed life. Agnes was no longer a thorn in his side; for not only had Dorothy effaced all recollection of his pain, but the Manor House was let. Mrs. Todd-Hardyng resided in London, seeking to fill a void heart with gaiety, and to stifle remorse in a whirl of excitement.

Ten years, then, had passed since that visit of Dorothy to the Nurses' Institute—ten years in which some dear ones had departed, but in which others equally beloved had arrived to take their place.

It was summer—one of those summers fraught with bright days and warm nights, when ponds are shallowed and corn ripens without a check. It was evening—an evening during that anxious time between sickle and scythe when, according to the farmer's wife, nothing will thrive. The stable-clock had struck eight. The sun was about to dip below the Coombe Hills and

give place to the gentler moon. Yet before doing so, and as if unwilling to quit a scene so fair, he shot a few last glorious beams across the wide plain; and these gilded the oak-woods, kissed the church's old tower, lighted on the terrace of Chudleggh Hall, and breathed a kind adieu on three persons who sat there, hard by the balustrade.

One of these was Dorothy, in a low basket-chair,—her back to the house, her face to the dipping sun. Its beams were reflected in her soft eyes, played upon her dark hair, toned the yet brilliant colour of her cheek. She was gazing abstractedly at the vale below, dreaming sweet things, reflecting gratefully that all whom she most loved, and who yet remained, mingled with her daily life.

Near to her sat an old lady with snow-white hair, pure face, and eye as yet undimmed; whose half-sad, half-calm smile betokened that where sorrow once had dwelt

peace had returned ; that although she still loved what had been taken, a great fund of love remained for what was spared.

And seated on the balustrade was Martin, his feet dangling in mid-air ; his back to the dipping sun ; his glance now fixed on Dorothy, now on the mother who had striven to make him what he was, resting against whose knee he had disburdened his young grief, who in years gone by had comforted when comfort was most required.

Silence is oft-times the presage of great happiness. So now, the three were silent. Their thoughts were in harmony with the time, and with each other. At such an hour, to chatter about things indifferent is to break a fond spell, to disturb the bonds of a tender communion which is too costly to be parted from, and which to express would be to abase.

Nor was it until the sun's last bright ray had disappeared that Martin spoke.

“ You had a letter from Theo this morning, Dorothy ? ”

“ Yes, dear. She says that Mr. Copeland cannot possibly get away in September, but that if we can take them in some time during October they will be able to pay us a long visit.”

“ Let us say October, then,” returned Martin.

“ She wants to know, dear, whether she may bring baby.”

“ Of course she may bring baby. We’ve a nursery and tubs and cradles, and you’ll have ample time, old lady, to lay in a double supply of tops-and-bottoms or whatever it is that babies love to feed upon.”

“ Attend to your own business, sir,” retorted Dorothy.

“ What else did she say ? ” inquired Martin.

“ That Fanny has become devout, and

induced Kidwelly to abandon whiskers, adopt a black slouch hat, exhibit the smallest possible amount of linen, and affect the most clerically orthodox of costumes."

"Just what I should have expected," growled Martin;—"the very line she was sure to take when married life had lost its freshness."

"Theo adds that Fanny is dreadfully scandalized at the George Spencers, who give tennis-parties on Sunday, and laugh in Kidwelly's face when he attempts to remonstrate."

"Does she allude to Minnie?"

"Not in this letter."

Martin was silent, his thoughts reverting to the past.

"I cannot conceive why that girl has never married," he exclaimed at last. "She would have made any man a good wife."

Dorothy could have explained the matter had not her lips been sealed.

“How is it, dear?” continued Martin. “You are a woman, and no doubt can give a reason.”

“I think,” said Dorothy, blushing at the prevarication,—“I think that she has never loved a man whom she could marry.”

“I suppose it must be that,” returned Martin reflectively. “Yet it seems very strange.”

“The Globe-trotter was here this afternoon,” remarked Dorothy, willing to change the subject. “He said that he had put his cottage into apple-pie order, and that you must pay it a visit.”

“Dear old Globe-trotter! To think of his fixing upon Chudlegh, of all places in the world, in which to end his days.”

“He is so fond of the children, dear.”

“And of the children’s mother,” added Martin slyly.

“He declares that at last he has found a resting-place; that his bones must lie in the old churchyard, where the children can scatter his grave each week with flowers. But I must be off,” she exclaimed, starting from her chair. “I must give the bairns a last kiss.”

“Aye, dear, go.” Then, when she had disappeared, he added, “May God bless both you and them.”

“May God bless both her and them,” murmured old Mrs. Ffrench.

“And you, mother, must go indoors. The dew is falling, and were you to take a chill you would lie awake—coughing all night.”

When both mother and wife had retired, Martin descended from his perch, and paced to and fro the terrace. He remembered how much he had suffered on that very spot, all that he now enjoyed;

and, mindful of present blessings, he sang
—cheerily, thankfully, out of a tuneful
heart—

“The Future hides in it
Gladness and sorrow;
We press still thorow,
Nought that abides in it
Daunting us,—onward.”

THE END.

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